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"DEAR GOD! I THANK THEE." (Page 16.)

WHERE IS HEAVEN?

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN

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WHERE IS HEAVEN?

CHAPTER I.

MESSENGERS OF GOD.

A POORLY-CLAD boy cowered in the vestibule of a large handsome house in Breslau. The short winter day was drawing to a close, and, although it was not yet too dark for the child to carry about his little stock of fine white sand, he curled himself up in the corner behind the broad staircase, as though he had—for to-day, at least—abandoned all efforts to sell it. He had taken off his shabby and torn boots, and vainly tried to rub some warmth into his numb feet with his little shaking fingers,

themselves almost helpless with the cold. Now he stroked down his curly blond hair as smoothly as he could, and, placing the bag filled with sand close against the wall, he laid his head upon it and spread a larger sack, already emptied of its contents, over him. But still it was so bitter cold! His teeth chattered, and, rub his hands as he might, they yet remained blue and stiff.

A side-door opened and a servant passed through the hall bearing a tray filled with cups of fragrant, steaming coffee; in a basket on her arm appeared delicious-looking hot rolls.

The shivering little boy did not move—he was afraid of being discovered and again driven out into the cold street—but sudden tears rolled over his pale cheeks. He was so hungry, and had still so far to go before he should reach the room where his old blind grandmother dwelt; and he felt, be-

sides, so tired—so deadly tired—that it seemed he could never stand up again.

"Only a quarter of an hour will I rest," thought the child, "and then I will run fast, that grandmother and Rosa may not be anxious at my long stay. Perhaps they will have a pot of coffee to-night and something warm to eat because it is so very cold. I wonder if the new year that comes to-morrow will be better to us than the old one?" he continued to himself as he nestled shivering under the cold sack. "Grandmother has often said, 'When the distress is greatest, help is nearest;' but our distress is great, and no one helps us. And if grandmother does say, 'God sends his messengers into the world to help the poor and make glad the sorrowful,' I will never believe it again; for the messengers of God have not come to us, and yet grandmother is ever praying to the dear Lord, and I too pray every day.

Ach! ach!" he sighed; and again tears rolled from his heavy eyes. "What will I do if I cannot have warm clothes, and my hands and feet become so stiff with the cold that I cannot go about and sell my sand? Then must we all three go hungry —grandmother, Rosa and I?—Dear God I beg thee with all my heart, send only once thy messenger to us with—with a new coat, or with—"

Half dreamily the boy listened to the sound of an opening door and of footsteps passing through the hall, and it seemed as though a rustling of dresses and the whispering of soft voices were close beside him. But cold and fatigue had so overpowered him that his heavy eyelids only drooped lower and lower, and he sank into a sound sleep.

"It is really and truly a poor boy under the sack," again whispered a voice; and a

daring little eight-year-old maiden cautiously lifted a corner of the coarse linen sack, and dropped it again over the sleeper.

"Truly?" asked the other children—a boy and a girl—as they softly bent down to see the face of the strange visitor.

"How pale he looks!" said Margareth, the oldest of the group. "And see!" she added, pitifully, as she peeped beneath the sack; "how ragged his clothes are! He has no stockings; that is dreadful. Come! let us ask mother to give us some warm stockings for him."

"He may have some of mine," said Hubert, eagerly; and the three children ran up to their mother's sitting-room, at the head of the wide staircase, all talking at once of the poor boy they had found lying in the hall.

"I have so many things in my wardrobe; please give some of them to him, dear moth-

er," begged Hubert. "The poor boy must be half frozen."

"Besides stockings, he needs shoes," said the impulsive Elsie, "and perhaps my leather boots will fit him.—You know, Motherdie —those with the warm linings."

"No, he should have a thick jacket and warm woollen pants," said the motherly Margareth.—"And do you know what I would do, Motherdie," she cried, joyously clapping her hands: "I would not give them to him, but we might put them quietly in his sack while he is asleep."

"Yes, ach yes!" shouted Elsie.

"What great eyes he will make, and how glad he will be! Then, too, he need thank no one; for I know he will feel so strangely! —Oh, Motherdie, that will be lovely!"

The mother's dress was black and her face was sad, but as she listened to the children an expression of interest and sympathy

lighted her gentle, lovely countenance, and she said with a smile,

"But, my Elsie, always so impulsive, you forget that we have as yet nothing ready for this joyous surprise."

"Yes, truly," said Elsie, sobering a little and thoughtfully putting her hand to her forehead.

Just then Hubert came running into the room holding in one hand a pair of woollen stockings and in the other Elsie's boots.

"Not so hastily. Patience! patience!" said the mother, gently, taking the things from the children and laying them aside. "Wait only a few minutes, and I also will have a share in your pleasure." She left the room, but soon returned with a large box, which she placed upon the floor and carefully opened.

The joyous excitement of the children was softened as they earnestly looked at the

mother and then at the box, which they knew well; and Margareth's eyes filled with tears.

"Will you give away the clothes of our dear Fritz?" she whispered, softly.

The mother took from the box a warm suit of clothes, almost new, with a cloak and a winter cap. Stockings and shoes accompanied these, besides a large woollen shawl and knitted woollen gloves. One moment her glance lingered with painful sadness on the clothes, that had been worn but a short time since by her own lost boy; then she handed the jacket and the cloak to Margareth, the other things to the younger ones, and said,

"Now go, my children; go and care for the poor boy down stairs. He also is your brother, only it is not so well with him as with you; therefore he needs double love. Will the clothes fit him?"

"Yes, indeed," cried the children; "he is just as tall as our dear Fritz."

With happy faces they hastened away; but Margareth held her sister fast a moment and said warningly,

"Softly, softly, that we may not awaken him. You must not chatter, Elsie."

Elsie nodded her golden head, and noiselessly they glided down the stairs.

The boy still lay as they had left him, sleeping soundly; but the light in the hall had grown dim, and the children's eyes must become accustomed to the gloom before they could begin their work. Margareth carefully lifted the empty sack, and with faces glowing with excitement the children packed in it the warm winter garments, the cloak at the bottom, stockings and shoes on top. When they had finished, Hubert with a triumphant glance brought forth his share, the hot rolls, and laid them in the mouth of the now

upright-standing sack. He then tried the weight of the bag, wound the cord loosely around the top and placed it in the corner, close by the head of the sleeping boy, who at this moment deeply sighed and moved.

The children quickly stole away, but stood still on the upper landing to watch and listen. A servant lighted the lamps in the hall and went away. The heavy tread of the man or the brilliant flood of light awakened the boy. He sat up and rubbed his heavy eyes, then reached out his hand for the cover he had spread over himself, but could not find it. Frightened, he started up, now fully aroused and forgetful of the cold that had so tormented him:

"Ach! My sack is gone! Some one has taken it!"

He anxiously looked around, and his glance suddenly fell on the well-filled bag which stood beside him. Is that his sack?

Astonished, doubting, he touched it with his fingers; he examined the cord with which it was fastened. Yes, truly, it was his sack. He recognized all the knots which he had vainly tried to untie; he beheld on the upper edge the familiar patch of blue—a piece of his grandmother's old apron with which a kindly neighbor had mended it. But what, then, had happened? Who had filled the sack? Had the messengers of God— Had they really come while he slept? And did the bag hold something for himself? His heart beat violently; he stood irresolute, but at last ventured to loosen the cord and peep in. With trembling hands and feverish excitement he lifted out one article after another. He could not doubt that all these things were for him. In greater haste he laid the wonderful treasures back again and fell on his knees.

"Ach, thou dear God!" he cried, aloud;

"I thank thee that thou hast sent thine angels to me; I thank thee many, many times. But what will Rosa say, and grandmother? Ach! I was never so happy in all my life." Bright tears of joy streamed over the little pale face.

Over the baluster above leant three eager childish heads, and in their eyes also shone tears of sympathy, while their hearts beat with the joy of those who know how "blessed it is to give."

The poor boy sped homeward with his welcome burden, and the children returned to their mother, but more quietly than before. To them had come a blissful consciousness not unmingled with awe.

The mother looked up from her work and smiled at the little group, but Elsie ran to her and quickly hid her glowing face on her shoulder as she whispered,

"Oh, mother, think what the poor boy

imagined! He thought God had sent his angels to him while he slept."

"And is it not true?" asked the mother, gently raising the child's face. "The Lord sends his messengers to all who are poor, suffering or troubled when they most need help—always at the right moment. There are, alas! many who shut their ears to the Master's call—many who pay but little heed; but those who once have known this blessed privilege of ministering to the poor or afflicted ones feel that it is a heavenly mission and is rewarded by a peace and happiness which no earthly pleasure can bestow."

"But if one has no money, he is unable to help the poor, dear mother," said Margareth.

"There are other means of doing good within the power of every one, my child. It is often but little that God requires of us for our suffering brother—sometimes only a friendly encouraging glance, a comforting

or warning word at the right moment, a giving up of our own wills, a 'soft answer,' a little effort to smooth out the tangled threads for others. Often, truly, it is also a great sacrifice—something that requires great effort and endurance. And if we are not angels, but only poor faulty human beings, yet may we all be the messengers of God in our quiet, untiring labors of love, humble and unperceived, as in the silent night the dew from heaven refreshes and strengthens the plants of the earth. Is this not true, my children? and will you not strive, ever with hearts full of love, to wander, as messengers of the Master, on this beautiful God's earth, helping and making glad whenever it is in your power?"

The children had closely gathered around their mother and listened attentively to her words. She bent her head, and the matronly Margareth said thoughtfully,

"If all mothers would but do as you have done to-day, Motherdie, and would give the pretty warm clothing which they keep stored away in memory of their lost ones, who are in heaven and need nothing more, to the poor children who have so little, it would, be well; would it not, dear mother? Why do they not?"

"There are many good people in the world dear child, and many hearts and hands ever ready to soften the hard lot of the poor. We will belong to that class as much as it is in our power. Let us begin the new year with this resolution. And now to work, my children! The lamps are lighted, and father will soon be here."

"Yes, Motherdie; we must indeed be industrious," said Elspeth the impulsive, with an important air. "I have curtains to put up in my dolls' house, and mirrors, and to fill the chandeliers with fresh candles; for to-mor-

row is the court-ball and everything must be in order."

"And I must dust our bookcase from top to bottom, arrange the books regularly, inspect my regiment and repair my fortress."

Margareth laughed merrily:

"I have the best of it. My things are all in order; and if the old year peeps in for a parting look, he will be quite satisfied with the prospect for his successor."

"Ach! he can no longer see well," cried Elspeth, saucily; "he is so old that he cannot stoop down and peer into all the corners."

Laughing and jesting, Hubert and Elsie hastened to the playroom, while Margareth assisted her mother in the arrangement of the tea-table; for the Kommerzienrath Willmers liked to be surrounded by his family circle on the last day of the year, and closed his counting-house earlier than usual on this evening.

Meanwhile, the poor boy ran homeward as quickly as he could with his double load through the blinding snow. The joy that filled his heart or the rapid motion had made him warm when he eagerly mounted the steps which led to his grandmother's little room; he was quite unconscious of the cold or the storm.

It had become dark, and, although the child had ascended the stairs many times, he was now compelled to moderate his haste; for the staircase was narrow and high, and in the upper story lacked a railing. But at last he reached the shabby little door, and, gently opening it, peeped in to see whether his grandmother were awake or asleep. But, as though she had long waited this moment, a slender little maiden sprang from a low stool to the boy's side, threw both arms about his neck and burst into violent weeping.

"What is the matter, Rosa? Do not

choke me," said the boy, in frightened tones, as he let both sacks slip from his hands, and tenderly held the sobbing child. "Are you hungry? Are you cold? Do not cry so. See! I have bread for you, and here in the sack are warm clothes and shoes and—"

"Grandmother is sick; and you must not not leave me again, Fritz: I am afraid."

"Grandmother sick?" repeated Fritz, anxiously; and he walked toward the bed.

The old Frau lay there with closed eyes, breathing quietly as though she slept, and by the dim light of the little lamp her face seemed no paler than usual.

The sister raised her tear-swollen eyes, and inquiringly looked, now at her brother, then at the sleeping figure on the bed.

"I do not see why you should be troubled about grandmother," whispered the boy. "She sleeps well; why think you she is sick?"

"Frau Hanna has said so, and the doctor

whom she called to see grandmother. She has lain there since early morning, and has not moved or spoken, and—"

"And you, Rosa—what have you done? Have you had nothing to eat?"

"Nothing; and I have been so sorry and so hungry! and I have prayed for the messengers of the Lord; but," she continued, with a sob, "they have not come. And then I grew frightened; it was so still that I—"

"But, Rosa," uttered Fritz, exultantly, half aloud, "only think: the messengers of the Lord have come to me. Look into this sack, and you will surely believe it. Think you it is filled with sand? Oh yes—beautiful sand! See! see here!" and the boy hastily unpacked the comfortable stores, while the little sister stood still in wonder and delight. She listened with great astonished eyes to his story.

So absorbed were the two children in the discussion of this marvellous thing that had happened to Fritz that they started up in affright when the door opened and a neighbor walked in.

Frau Hanna silently nodded to them and went over to the bed where the grandmother lay. She bent over the sleeping woman, listened to her breathing and sadly shook her head. Then she drew the children with her to the window and said gently,

"You are such good children that you will not cry out and be unreasonable when I tell you that your grandmother must leave you."

"Grandmother will never leave us," uttered Fritz, quickly and decidedly.

But the little girl grew pale, and from her trembling lips sounded almost inaudibly,

"Will grandmother die?"

"Poor child!" murmured the neighbor;

and she stroked the sad face of the child. "Do you, then, know what death is?"

"Yes, I know," said Rosa: "it is to have golden wings and fly up to heaven to the dear God, where the sun shines ever and the many stars, and never more to be cold or hungry. Fritz and I would die too."

"Dear, dear!" murmured Frau Hanna; "it is high time the children were in other hands. The good old soul has filled their minds with fairy-tales.—Come, children," she continued, comfortingly; "do not weep, but go to bed. I will stay here."

"No, I cannot sleep," replied Rosa, vehemently.

"Rosa, do not be obstinate," begged the woman. "See! I have brought you a piece of buttered bread."

The child shook her head and turned away.

"Look, Fritz, how naughty Rosa is again,

and how she tries me." The woman looked provoked, and Fritz spoke earnestly to his sister, but she would not yield.

"I know," she whispered, "if we sleep, they will carry grandmother away, as they did Frau Hanna's husband, and then we will be left alone."

"Listen, Rosa. You have often told me that you loved me," began Frau Hanna again; "I have lived beside you for years, and have often helped your grandmother and been good to you. Is this the way you thank me for it? Come, Rosa; believe that I know what is best; and if you love me, go quietly to rest."

The child at last bent her head in token of obedience, and soon after the brother and sister slipped under the coverlet of their but scantily-provided beds.

The neighbor sat with folded hands before the table, and murmured softly to herself:

"Death is a messenger of the Lord; he comes for each one at his appointed time. The grandmother has often said this, and now it has proved true. But who will care for the desolate children? Will the Master send his messengers for them also? Ach! I believe the good old Frau has made me superstitious too."

She ceased her soliloquy and glanced almost timidly at the little window, which shook and rattled in the storm. She opened the Bible that lay upon the table and began to read, but the poor washerwoman had worked hard all day and was very tired. Fainter and fainter grew the whispered words; her head fell forward on the book, and soon her loud regular breathing betrayed that she was sound asleep.

But the little Rosa slept not. With beating heart, and eyes wide open she stared incessantly at her grandmother and at Frau

Hanna. Now she noiselessly left her bed, slipped into her dress and carried her little stool to the side of the sick woman. There she became more quiet. She tenderly clasped her grandmother's hand in both her own, and comforted herself with the consciousness that no one could carry her dear grandmother away.

The tide of busy life still swept through the streets of the great city, in spite of the late hour and the driving snow; a neighboring clock sounded the last hour of the year; carriages rolled by, and merry voices rang out in ofttimes noisy greetings; but the echoes of a happy human life touched not the attic-chamber: a mightier power stood outside this door. The icy night-wind passed over the roofs, whistling and howling, penetrated the poorly-fastened window and threatened to extinguish the dim light, even as the passing hours must extinguish the almost imperceptible spark of life in the sick woman.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW YEAR.

HOW changed was the world overnight! Blue and cloudless shone the heavens; the air was still, and a foot high lay the dazzling white snow in the streets; trees and bushes stood enveloped in a wonderfully beautiful starry covering as in silvery fairy-bloom. The sun was still concealed by the early morning mist, but a rosy shimmer gleamed through the filmy veil, softening the splendor of the enchanted world.

Kommerzienrath Willmers took his customary morning walk, and as he quietly moved along, returning with friendly nod and smile the many respectful greetings that

met him on every side, his cheeks reddened by the fresh air, his thick hair only slightly touched with gray, one would have guessed him to be a man yet in the prime of life; but Herr Willmers was in reality a much older man. He had married late, having patiently waited until he could offer his wife a home of ease and luxury. To this end he had labored long and earnestly, for he had started in life almost penniless, and at first had not been very successful. Many difficulties beset his path, but a brave, true unfaltering spirit and a strong will had enabled him to surmount them all; and now for some years he had rejoiced in an assured position and a happy domestic life.

The greatest of all his riches to Herr Willmers were his children. To him there was nothing in the world more beautiful than the rosy, laughing faces of his little ones, no sweeter music than their merry voices, and

the happiest hour of the day was that which once more brought him face to face with his beloved family group. Therefore the death of little Fritz, his youngest boy, had deeply grieved the tender father, and to-day, as on many another morning, he turned his steps toward the grave of his lost child. The solitude of the cemetery was unbroken; the only sounds that penetrated its sacred silence were the distant city bells, and the pure white untrodden snow seemed a fit covering for the loved and lost, and too fair for the footprints of man.

Herr Willmers slowly stepped between the heavily-laden trees and stood with saddened face beside the little mound, raised only a few weeks before, over his sleeping child.

"My darling child, farewell!
I would have bid thee stay
When they bore thee away,
'Neath sorrow's grievous spell,

Yet faith has come to-day,
And now my heart can say,
'Thou art with Christ.
Farewell.'"

The fragment of this song unconsciously passed his lips, and tears filled his eyes.

"Yet it was soon to leave us, my dear, dear Fritz!" murmured the father's heart.

Loudly and clearly through the stillness rang "Fritz, Fritz! Stay with me!"

Herr Willmers started, and, turning around, perceived a little boy, who shyly approached him. When the child stood before him, he glanced up with frank, honest blue eyes —such eyes as his own lost Fritz had possessed—and said gently,

"Good-morning, Herr; but you are not the—the gravedigger?"

"No; surely not, my boy. Is your name 'Fritz'?"

"Yes, Herr; and here comes Rosa. She

is frightened, and calls me if I go only a few steps away."

Herr Willmers seemed scarcely to hear what the child said. He observed with momentary astonishment the clothing of the boy, and touched with his fingers the fur trimming on the coat and the warm winter cap.

"Tell me, child: who has bought you this pretty coat and fur cap?" he asked, earnestly.

Rosa at this moment came up to them and seized her brother's hand.

"Truly, Herr, are they not wonderfully beautiful?" said Fritz, confidentially. "No one has bought them," he continued, in lowered, mysterious tones, "for God's angels brought them to me while I slept, because we are so poor and I was half frozen with the cold. But they brought nothing for Rosa," he concluded, in a dissatisfied manner, looking sadly at his little sister.

Now for the first time Herr Willmers glanced at Rosa. The little girl's dress was thin and faded, and Frau Hanna had carefully tied over her head and shoulders the shabby woollen shawl of the dead grandmother, out of which the pale childish face looked up with eyes unnaturally large from loss of sleep and reddened with weeping.

The warm, child-loving heart of the rich man was deeply moved, and his interest aroused in the little ones as Rosa said quickly, with a sob,

"I need nothing; the angels will take me to grandmother. She is in heaven, and I would go to her."

Tears rolled again over her face, and she wept aloud; nor could all her brother's consoling words and caresses quiet her. At last Fritz too began to cry.

"You say, my boy, that God's angels have cared for you while you slept; can you not

still further trust in God? And will not Rosa also trust?" said Herr Willmers. "Surely, little ones, he helps us all and listens to our prayers."

"Is your grandmother dead too?" asked Rosa, drying her eyes. "And has God given you another?"

The Kommerzienrath answered not; earnestly and thoughtfully he looked on the little mound at his feet. Then, with sudden resolution, he took a hand of each of the children and walked with them as he listened to their story. He accompanied them to the house in which they lived, mounted the four steep flights of stairs and stood with them beside the bed of the grandmother, who lay, silent for evermore, in the cold, poor little room, and yet who at this moment spoke with impressive power to the heart of this compassionate man.

"Ach, Herr!" uttered Fritz, complaining-

ly; "grandmother has always said God would help at the right time, and would send his messengers to all the poor; and yesterday I thought she was right. But of what use now are the beautiful clothes? I am still more unhappy than yesterday, and I can go out to earn nothing more; for who will stay with Rosa?"

"I will go with you, Fritz," sighed the little girl. "Grandmother has often told me we must not weep when she went to heaven, but I know I can never cease weeping—never, never more;" and again the child sobbed in a perfect passion of grief.

Frau Hanna had come in, and now wonderingly looked at the early and distinguished visitor; but her astonishment grew still greater, for she had scarcely begun her story of the sad life of the grandmother and the destitution of the children when Herr Willmers cut her short with the dec-

laration that he would take the children to his house and care for them.

With a relieved expression, Frau Hanna clasped her hands in joyous excitement as she exclaimed,

"Is such good-fortune, then, possible? We have lived here side by side for years, and the little ones have grown into my heart; and if I were not so poor myself, I would have already bidden them stay with old Hanna. But it must be that the blessed grandmother was right, and from this hour I will believe in her words: God forsakes not those who trust in him. Dear pious heart! you can rest in peace," she continued, and her eyes filled with tears as she drew near the bed, "for the dear God has indeed cared for your darlings."

Fritz and Rosa stared with great eyes at Herr Willmers, but said nothing. They did not know how they descended the four flights

of steps, and as in a troubled dream, a hand of each once more in one of the good man's, they walked through the city streets, entered the vestibule of a large and beautiful house, mounted a wide staircase, and found themselves in an apartment furnished in what seemed to them fairylike magnificence.

Herr Willmers took off his cap and with gentle hands removed the shawl from Rosa's head and shoulders.

"Now, dear children, here shall your home be," he said, with a kindly smile. "The loving mother whom God has given you to-day already waits with the morning coffee. Come."

Rosa half unconsciously passed her little cold fingers over her brother's hair and her own, then shyly and confused they followed the master of the house.

But with no less amazement than that of the children who unannounced entered the

inviting breakfast-room stared the members of the family group at their unexpected appearance; the father was not, as usual, greeted by the joyful "Good-morning" of his children, and even Frau Willmers looked with mute surprise at the little strangers.

"Good-morning, my loved ones! God give us a blessed new year!" cried the Kommerzienrath, in a hearty voice; and, recovering from their unaccustomed silence, the children hastened to their father and kissed and embraced him, while the tardy morning greeting, with New-Year wishes, flowed impetuously from their lips.

"The new year begins by adding to our riches," said the father, in moved tones, as he led Fritz and Rosa to the mother.—"It brings thee two children, dear mother-heart, to share the abundance of your love, for they have no one in the wide world to care for them. Fritz sends them to thee; at his

grave I found them. The little fellow here is called 'Fritz,' and this is his sister Rosa; so— Well, give the children some hot coffee, Margareth. Is our mother satisfied with her New-Year present?" continued Herr Willmers, softly, earnestly looking into the gentle eyes of his wife, now veiled by tears.

"You good man! You well know how gladly I will receive them; but in this association— It is a great responsibility and worthy of consideration. Has not your warm heart decided impulsively? Will it be well for our own children?"

"Yes, I hope so. They have good, unspoiled childish hearts; and if they are left to fall into misery and sin, for that would I be responsible. God led them to me: how could I turn away from them?"

"No, no! not that; but care for them in a different manner: place them in a good home and have them educated, or—"

"Little mother," laughingly interrupted the Kommerzienrath, "I have often said that you were unlike many women who only come to a wise decision after much argument. Am I mistaken? Will not my wife herself bravely undertake the important duty that I might pay others to perform without knowing whether it was well fulfilled?"

"Yes, you are right," earnestly replied Frau Willmers; "I will have five children instead of our three. Pardon my hesitation, and be assured, dear husband, that I will love and care for them even as for my own."

Herr Willmers kissed the lips whose smile gave evidence to the sincerity of the words:

"I thank thee, my Marie; I am truly a happy man, and richly blessed."

Meanwhile, Margareth had cared for the children, who, having eaten but little for two days, did ample justice to their breakfast. Fritz soon lost his shyness before the mer-

ry chatter and questions of the children, but Rosa, who had seldom left her grandmother's attic-chamber, held fast her brother's hand, and, timorous as a young roe that for the first time leaves the protecting forest thicket and fearfully looks over the wide plain, glanced around the spacious apartment and into the strange faces, which resembled neither her grandmother's nor yet Frau Hanna's.

Suddenly the brother and sisters put their heads together in eager whispering,

"Did you also recognize it?" asked Elsie, in great excitement, of her older sister. "How could I help knowing our Fritz's coat?"

"And how well it fits him!" whispered Hubert. "But how strange it all is!"

"Not strange at all," explained Elsie. "We said so much yesterday to our father of the poor boy, and he recognized Fritz's

clothes also. He too knew how glad we would be if he brought him to us. And the pretty little sister! I would rather have her than all my dolls."

"Yes, but, Chatterbox, two children more!" said Margareth, thoughtfully. "I wonder where they will sleep? and I must find a place for their things."

"But, Margareth," whispered Elschen, mischeivously, "have the children 'things'? Do you know later we will dress up the little girl? for she cannot remain as she now is, and it is New Year to-day."

"Yes, and it is high time that we prepare ourselves for church," reminded Hubert. "Truly, I would like to stay at home to-day and show Fritz my fortress, but—"

"No, no! you must not think of that; mother will not allow it," said Margareth, decidedly. "We must all go to church; Susanne will care for the children."

And Susanne, the faithful old nurse, so well performed her duty that Frau Willmers and the children, on their return from church, scarcely recognized the little ones; and so delicate and pretty appeared Rosa in a little frock outgrown by Elsie, and made to fit by slight alteration at the hands of the good Susanne, that Elsie joyfully danced around her, overwhelming her with kisses and embraces.

"It will be too delightful if we can always play together," she chattered, happily. "Will it not, dear Rosa? For, you see, Margareth has her lessons and many other things to do, and cannot often play with me; for she is four years older. Do you know to-day is the great court-ball with my dolls? The Princess will be there, and we shall have ices and cakes. Shall I show you the Princess and her court-ladies?"

Rosa sadly shook her head:

"I would rather go to grandmother," she begged, shyly.

"Yes, Rosa; mother says we may all some day go where your grandmother has gone, but not now. You have only just come, little Rosa, and I will show you my dolls and their beautiful house. Come!" and Elsie drew her into the large playroom, which contained many beautiful things for the amusement and instruction of the children, while not far off two pretty little apartments were furnished as bedrooms for Hubert and his sisters.

The other children followed Elsie and Rosa, and now Margareth and Hubert brought out their favorite games and treasures to entertain the little strangers.

Poor Rosa was so overpowered by all that had happened to-day that she could only passively follow Elsie's directions; she looked at toys and books and listened with

a confused and troubled expression to the animated talk of the lively child. She glanced ever longingly toward Fritz, and breathed more freely when Frau Willmers appeared and beckoned her children away, to leave the new comers to themselves, and herself arranged a table at which they might sit and look at the books and the pictures if they wished.

The brother and the sisters obediently followed their mother, and Fritz and Rosa remained alone.

"Ach, Fritz!" said Rosa, pressing close to her brother; "I wish we could go home. It is so strange here!"

"'Home'?" repeated Fritz. "How you talk, Rosa! Do you not know that the landlord would not let us stay there any longer, because we could not pay the rent? He said we must go at New Year, and to-day is New Year."

"Ach, yes! And grandmother is dead, and I want to die too. It is so sad without her!" softly uttered Rosa.

Fritz put his arm tenderly around her.

"But think, Rosa, how good they are to us here! We ought to be happy."

The child shook her head.

"Yes, we must be happy," continued the two-years-older brother. "If you had run about as I have, up and down steps, hungry and cold, in my old shabby clothes, then you might be glad that you need not do it any more. You too have been hungry and cold often enough, and afraid when grandmother slept and you were alone. Have you not, Rosa?"

"Yes! Ach, yes!" assented Rosa.

"Well, do you not see that now we will no longer be hungry and cold? and grandmother is in heaven and is happy also. Are we not truly fortunate? and should we not

right beautifully thank the dear God for it?"

Rosa had ceased weeping, and listened to him attentively.

"Yes, Fritz," she said, earnestly; "let us do it now. Grandmother has often said that she would be happy in heaven if we continued good children."

And when Frau Willmers lightly pushed aside the curtains of the glass door and looked into the children's room, she saw two little figures kneeling with bowed heads and folded hands. She clasped her own hands, and her lips moved in a murmured prayer that God would give her strength faithfully to fulfil the duty she had undertaken.

After dinner the family went out for a walk, but Elsie begged permission to remain at home with the new little sister, who looked so pale and sad that the mother con-

sented, hoping that rest and sleep would bring forgetfulness to the sorrowing child.

Truly, the company of the lively Elsie—known in the family circle as "Chatterbox"—was not exactly soothing in its effect, but Susanne had promised that Rosa should have not only amusement, but also quiet; and when Susanne gave a promise, you might be sure that she would keep her word. So Rosa lay on a comfortable couch in the cosy little sleeping-room of the sisters, and Elsie sat on a stool beside her and talked of the good times that would come with the evening. On every New Year's evening Aunt Seraphine and Aunt Theodolinde came to supper, and they played games, and— In the midst of Elsie's liveliest chatter Susanne put her head in at the door and whispered, "Elschen, I have a beautiful red ribbon which I think you will want for the Princess, and some spangles for

the crown;" and in a flash Elsie was out through the door after Susanne, and for the next half hour engaged in zealous preparation for the court-ball.

Rosa's heart beat quickly when she found herself quite alone, but the sleepless night, the long walk in the morning air, the pain and the excitement had so exhausted her little strength that in a few minutes her eyes closed; and when Elsie again slipped in, she dared not continue her interrupted plans, for she found Rosa sweetly sleeping.

When it grew dark, Jacob—who, like Susanne, was an old and devoted servant in the Willmers family—lighted not only the lamps and the side-candelabra, but also the great chandeliers in the parlors and the dining-room. Margareth, like a true little housewife, observantly wandered from one room to another, moving here a vase, there a pretty book, to better advantage, dusting—as Elsie

declared, for the tenth time—the speckless furniture, and stooping to pick an almost invisible thread or an imaginary crumb, of both of which she had a horror, from the clean carpet, and became at last quite impatient with Hubert, who had already twice softly untied the strings of her long white apron, until it slipped down and she almost tripped over it.

Now all the festive preparations for the New Year evening were ended. The parents sat in happy companionship at the cosy tea-table; the children were in the playroom, an interested audience to the play of Cinderella, announced for this evening, to be performed by the dolls under the management of Hubert. The bell rang.

Elsie looked over the banister in the hall and reported:

"Yes, they have come: it is Aunt Theodolinde and Aunt Seraphine."

"We will go in and greet them later," said Hubert; "now we must stay here. The stage is prepared, the lights are burning and the play will begin immediately;" and as the curtain of the mimic theatre rolled up, the little paper actors, guided by Hubert's skilful fingers, moved across the stage like living figures, and the children now laughed, now almost wept, at the different positions assumed and the conversation carried on by Hubert's voice, modulated to suit the various characters. Even Rosa's sad face brightened, and she breathlessly listened to the beautiful story of Cinderella, the unfortunate stepchild, who at times seemed even as sorrowful and forlorn as herself.

Meanwhile, an animated discussion was progressing in the parlor.

Fraulein Theodolinde and Seraphine von Ebendorf were early friends of Frau Willmers, who had proved a true benefactress to

them in the many and varied fortunes that had come to them. Daughters of a wealthy landholder, they had been educated in luxurious habits only later to find themselves impoverished by a succession of misfortunes. Haughty and unbending, the maidens held little attraction for wooers; and now they lived on the interest of a small capital saved from the wreck of their property, which with great economy proved barely sufficient for their support. They had become so embittered by their unfortunate circumstances that they looked upon life and all connected with it with the gloomiest views.

Fraulein Theodolinde was short and stout; her large dark eyes, overshadowed by heavy brows, gave a severe expression to her countenance. The younger sister, slender, with pale delicate face framed in light-brown hair thickly sprinkled with gray, might have been called pretty had her blue eyes held

more sunshine in their depths. An observant spectator might read the discontent and the unhappiness of both sisters in their faces.

In former years Herr Willmers had laughingly asked his wife why she had chosen to invite these friends always on New Year's Day.

"Because I like to begin the new year by doing good," she had replied. "And it is well for them to look into our happy home and for a few hours forget their ceaseless complaints. Besides," she whispered in his ear, with a smile, "they enjoy the accustomed luxuries for whose loss they daily grieve."

Since then the Kommerzienrath had himself befriended them in many ways, and as surely as New Year's Day returned Fraulein Theodolinde and Fraulein Seraphine found themselves at the supper-hour in the joyous atmosphere of the Willmers family.

Herr Willmers sat now in serene content

beside his wife and gave the ladies an account of his morning's experience, which had so unexpectedly enriched the little world in the nursery.

"Oh, my dear Kommerzienrath," exclaimed Fraulein Theodolinde, in great commiseration, "what a burden you have taken upon yourself!"

"Beggar-children!" cried the tender Seraphine, throwing out her hands in horror. "A fearful experience is before you, dear Marie; I shudder at the thought of the two neglected, ragged children coming in contact with your own little ones."

"You are mistaken," calmly corrected Frau Marie; "they are pretty, bright children, well brought up and apparently not used to rough surroundings."

"But they will never thank you for your kindness—never!" declared Fraulein Theodolinde, who had a remarkable talent for

looking at life through dark spectacles, and who every year prophesied famines, wars or revolutions, began each day with the firm conviction that some frightful misfortune would happen before night, and perceived in each unfavorable omen the hopelessness of an inevitable and deadly sorrow, thus startling her younger, and perhaps too sensitive, sister into one fright after another. "Do you know, my dear Kommerzienrath, what your experience with these children will be?"

"Well?" smilingly inquired Herr Willmers.

"I can quite plainly picture it to you: The boy will prove a ne'er-do-well, and will lie too and deceive you; the girl will be self-willed and idle, and will run away if she is compelled to obey and work. Oh, I know humanity! Believe me, I am never mistaken."

The lips of the Kommerzienrath curled with an expression half angry, half mocking, and he questioningly glanced into the wise eyes of his wife, who also could hardly conceal a somewhat mischievous smile, but who serenely answered:

"No one is quite infallible, dear Theodolinde; I hope they will not turn out so badly as that."

"Yes, indeed, my love—quite as badly, and perhaps worse. Have you never heard of ingrates who have poisoned or murdered their benefactors?"

"Oh, horrible! horrible!" sighed Seraphine.

Herr Willmers could not restrain a laugh:

"Were my wife and I not so courageous, we might truly be alarmed at the prospect before us; but we have no misgivings. We will begin the new year with joyous hopes, not with fears."

"Alas! already to us to-day has come the misfortune that we have dreaded: the house is sold, and we must move."

"That is no misfortune," returned Herr Willmers, cheerfully; "there are still many good dwellings."

"But the separation!" sighed Seraphine; "only a woman's heart knows what that is. Oh how painful is every parting! and how often already have I struggled and wept over bitter farewells!"

"But not to four empty walls," said Frau Marie; "and you have often complained that the house was damp and gloomy."

"Yes, that is true; and I am sure that this is the reason I have suffered so with rheumatism in all my joints. My limbs ache now, and I can plainly see that I shall soon become a chronic invalid and confined to my bed."

"I shall die of anxiety," moaned the

younger sister. "Theodolinde is right: we are doomed to misfortune."

"No, she is not right," said Frau Marie, earnestly; "there are many harder trials than yours, for you are both still in health and have each other to love and live for. And, besides, the privilege of loving and living for others—that alone is a happiness for which we should daily thank our Creator. How, then, can you be so despondent? A single day—yes, a single moment—may bring new happiness into your life."

"That could happen only by a miracle, and I do not believe in miracles," uttered Theodolinde, with a bitter laugh.

The Kommerzienrathin looked thoughtful.

"I do not believe in so-called miracles," she said, gravely; "but I have already seen—many times in my life—that God finds ways and means to help us when we least expect it. Now, to-day, for instance. Is it not

really wonderful how he has just led those poor desolate children to us? Is it not a plain command from him: 'Take in the friendless ones'? My dear friends, you so often complain of your fate and grieve that you are poor and alone: cannot the Master also hold in reserve for you some unexpected good-fortune? and will he not at the right time find messengers to send even to you? Trust him still with patient hearts."

Seraphine's eyes had filled with tears and an almost hopeful expression had brightened her face at the earnest words of their friend, but the elder sister—she was generally harsh and abrupt in speech, although not really bad at heart—said vehemently,

"Send his messengers? To us, who for years have vainly hoped for some improvement in our prospects? I almost envy you your childish faith. Who, then, are the messengers of the Lord?"

"Who?" eagerly replied Frau Marie. "Every true-hearted human being; each one who comprehends that his life is for the glory of God and the good of his fellow-men; for it is a privilege to help others both by words and by works, and a well-spring of happiness to all who thus draw near enough to the Master to understand his call."

"Yes, dear sister; let us rise above our discontent," ventured Seraphine, contrary to her usual custom of only echoing her older sister's words and thoughts. "Let us hope that roses will bloom for us also, and something better than thorns be found in our path."

"Yes, hope! Hoping and waiting have deceived many," laughed Theodolinde. "Still, if you enjoy it, hope on."

"Now let us have the party from the playroom," suggested Herr Willmers.

Frau Marie rang a bell, and presently the merry little group appeared.

Elsie impulsively embraced the two aunts; they amused her and belonged to the good supper and the New-Year entertainment. Aunt Theodolinde related so many horrible stories, and Aunt Seraphine knew pretty verses and conundrums; so that she was always glad to remain in the parlor when they were there. Margareth and Hubert also greeted their guests as old friends.

The visitors looked curiously at Fritz and Rosa, who stood at the door in embarrassment, until the Kommerzienrath, taking them by the hand, led them into the room. Fritz bowed in a manly way, as though he had often been thrown with strangers, but Rosa timidly glanced at the two strange faces, whose sharp, penetrating eyes examined her with no friendly expression; and when Theodolinde said in her harsh tones, "So these are the two poor worms? Well, give me your hand, child," Rosa, with a troubled face,

put both hands under her apron and said softly but decidedly,

"No, I will not."

Fraulein Seraphine repeated in angry astonishment:

"She will not! What manners!"

But Theodolinde triumphantly looked up, as a dark flush colored her face.

"Rosa, be a good child," said Herr Willmers, gravely, "and give the lady your hand."

Rosa stood trembling, but with hands tightly clasped, and began to sob violently as Frau Marie tried to compel her to obedience.

"Ach, Rosa, Rosa!" now cried Fritz; "how obstinate you still are! Do it if you love me, Rosa, and—"

"The idea of talking of love to the little ingrate!" exclaimed Fraulein Theodolinde, scornfully.—"Do you know what they should do to you, you little savage? They should

whip you soundly and put you in the dark cellar, and—"

"Hush! oh hush!" begged Frau Marie, taking the child, who as one turned to stone gazed with a terrified expression into the flashing eyes of Theodolinde, in her arms. "Rosa is naughty only because she is shy. She will think better and be my good obedient little girl.—Will you not, Rosa?"

But Rosa only burst into more violent weeping and threw her arms about the neck of the kind Frau, who bore her into the children's room and when she became quiet talked gravely and gently to her a short time, then asked,

"Will Rosa now come with me and give her hand to the lady?"

"No! ach, no!" persisted the child.

Frau Marie looked disappointed.

"Well, then, you must stay here until you are good," she said, quietly; "but if you

continue naughty, then I must punish you. Think of it, and when I come again let me find my little girl willing to do as I wish." She left the room and returned to her guests.

Rosa stood still sobbing where the Kommerzienrathin had placed her. She murmured, "I will go home; I will find grandmother;" then, "Fritz, Fritz! I will not stay here!" But Fritz came not, because he dared not; and so minute after minute passed by, and she remained alone with her grief and her tears. At last she ceased crying and began anxiously to look about her. What had that wicked Frau who had looked so cross and frightened her so said? That they would whip her and put her in a dark cellar? And the good kind Frau, too, had said, "I must punish you."

Rosa trembled, and her little heart stormily beat against her breast; she began to

weep again: "I will go to grandmother; she never whips me or puts me in a dark cellar." But a new thought startled her: "Where is grandmother? Is she not dead? Is she not in heaven? Who—ach! *who*—will take me to her?" Who? The messengers of the Lord. Did they not help Fritz yesterday? They must to-day hear her prayers and sobs; they must pity her. She knelt down and amid her tears sent up her petition. But no one appeared. Yes; listen: a chair is moved in the next room.

"Now comes the wicked woman to put me in the cellar!" This thought flashed through the head of the excited, frightened child, and she sprang up, ran through the half-open door into the hall, down the stairs and, without pausing, out into the cold street.

The city was brilliantly illuminated, and the little maiden ran so quickly that she scarce-

ly felt the icy evening air. Great drops of perspiration stood on her forehead, and her hair lay in moist rings against her glowing face, when, completely exhausted, she stood still and, yet trembling, anxiously looked around her. Right and left long light streets stretched away into indefinite distance, but before her lay a wide snow-covered plain dotted by trees and shrubs.

Little Rosa considered several moments, then eagerly started forward. Over the trees gleamed the silver crescent of the moon; stars shone in the clear sky, which at the edge of the plain seemed to touch the earth. Surely this must be the right way to the grandmother? On and on she ran, as if fearing pursuit; and her little heart beat in deadly terror in the loneliness of the night. Suddenly the tired feet stumbled against a stone concealed by the snow; the child fell heavily forward and lay unconscious.

The noise which had so frightened Rosa as she knelt in the children's room was only the moving of a chair by one of the children in preparation for a universal game of "Lottery." But the children did not enjoy their games to-night with the usual zest. They would all much rather have gone to Rosa, especially Elsie, who was quite in love with the pretty little sister; but when she inquiringly looked at her mother, Frau Marie would gently shake her head. Even the imploring glances of little Fritz received the same answer.

When, after some time, Frau Marie arose and walked to the children's room, Rosa had disappeared; not a single trace of her could be found in the whole house. Great excitement prevailed, and it was only in obedience to the strict orders of the Kommerzienrath that Fritz refrained from rushing out into the street in search of his sister.

Messengers were sent in every direction, but all returned without news of Rosa. Vain was every effort to discover her whereabouts: she was neither with Frau Hanna nor in the streets of the city.

Never had a New-Year's Day in the house of the Kommerzienrath closed on a more unquiet family. The merry games of the children were suspended, and Elsie sat, with tears in her eyes, whispering her troubles to the court-ladies in her doll-house; they must postpone the ball, of course, until Rosa should be with them again. And the Princess, with her diadem of silver stars and her crimson sash, sat up on the sofa as stiffly as though she were deprived of her rights and disapproved of the whole proceeding.

The children sadly went to bed, and the parents sat up until late, wondering with troubled hearts as to the fate of their *protégée*.

When the carriage of the Kommerzienrath had conveyed Frauleins Theodolinde and Seraphine to their home and they had retired to their little bedroom, the elder sister observed almost triumphantly,

"Am I not always right, Sera? Such a little monkey will cause the good Willmers nothing but anxiety and trouble. Such a lovely supper almost wasted! Oh yes, I know human beings; I know how bad they all are."

"Dreadful! dreadful!" sounded Sera's sympathetic tones. "I have wrestled and struggled with my feelings the whole evening, for it seemed as though I must go out into the street myself and—"

"That were wise indeed! In this cold weather! You would be in bed to-morrow with nervous fever, and we are unfortunate enough. Oh what a year this will be, that has so begun! Unheard-of evils will over-

take us. I am filled with the most gloomy forebodings."

"Dear sister, let us go to rest," begged Seraphine; "it is almost midnight."

But after the sisters were in bed and the light extinguished, once more sounded Theodolinde's voice:

"Tell me honestly, Sera: was I too harsh in my manner toward the little crab? Is the whole trouble really my fault?"

"Your fault? You did not mean ill, Linda," faintly returned the younger sister.

"No, surely not; but I have such frightful palpitation of the heart, and I have always said I would die of heart-disease."

"My heart beats quickly too, Linda. Ach! Let us quietly go to sleep, I pray. We have wrestled and struggled so long! Perhaps God will yet send us some better days."

"Never, never!" uttered Theodolinde, de-

cidedly. "And how many tears this conviction has already cost me! You may well believe my eyes grow weaker every day. Yes, I know it is ordained that I shall have a cataract next; then I will sit helpless in my chair from morning until night, and you will have a blind sister added to your misfortunes."

"Dreadful! dreadful!" sighed Seraphine. "But now good-night!"

CHAPTER III.

IN HEAVEN.

THE moon shone brightly; stars sparkled in the heavens, and the wide plain, bounded neither by forest nor by mountain, seemed an endless, motionless snowy sea. The restless life and noise of the great city scarcely penetrated its calm; only the shrill whistle of a distant locomotive now and then interrupted the deep stillness. A railroad must be near.

The clear music of bells suddenly sounded through the evening stillness, and a sleigh rapidly glided over the snow-covered plain.

"Herr, some one lies here in the road," cried the coachman, hastily pulling back

his horses. "It is a child, and must be quite frozen."

But almost as quickly as the accustomed coachman had, a feminine figure wrapped in warm furs sprung to the spot, touched the little form lying in the snow, lifted it and returned to the sleigh bearing it in her arms.

"Ach, Herr Baron! See! it is a little girl cold and stiff as though dead, but the forehead bleeds and the heart beats still. We must take her with us to the railway-station; there we may procure help."

"Quite right, Sabine. But let us now go on quickly; there is barely time," returned a deep bass voice.

The lady pressed the child to her bosom tenderly as a mother, and swiftly the sleigh glided on its way as she chafed the benumbed limbs, that began to show signs of life before the station was reached.

In the warm room, Frau Sabine laid the

child on a sofa and covered her with soft robes; and when the baron—who meanwhile had gone to make the necessary arrangements for the continuation of his journey—again entered, the little one had already opened her eyes and gazed with troubled glances into the face of Frau Sabine, who bent over her.

It was an old face full of furrows and lines, but love and goodness beamed from the gentle eyes, love and goodness spoke in each wrinkle of the smiling countenance; and after the child had searchingly looked at the old Frau for several minutes, she suddenly put both arms about her neck and shyly whispered,

"Do you look so now, grandmother? Ach! how I have wanted you!"

"Do you want your grandmother, child?" asked Frau Sabine, with sympathy.

"Yes—ach, yes!"

"Where does she live?"

"In heaven," said the little girl; and, sitting up, she anxiously looked around. "Am I not with her? Where am I, then?"

Sabine turned in perplexity to the baron, who stood beside her. He glanced at his watch, then asked quickly,

"Have you parents, child?"

"No," said Rosa, in a troubled tone.

"You live, then, with your grandmother?"

"Yes—no. Grandmother is dead, and I would die too."

"Ach! ach!" cried Frau Sabine; and she stroked Rosa's feverish cheek. "The child is sick; she seems quite friendless. Wants to die and go to heaven! What can I say to her? Poor lamb! I pity her."

The baron hastily went out. The bell rang for the passengers to take their places.

"Be quiet, my lamb; be quiet," said the

old Frau, soothingly. "We will all go to heaven when it pleases God."

The child looked up dreamily, and Frau Sabine anxiously waited for the return of the baron. She knew well, through long years' acquaintance with his generous heart, that he would not leave the waif uncared for; but how?

Quickly the baron re-entered:

"Have you a thick shawl for the child?"

"Yes, baron;" and instantly from the depths of the great travelling-satchel appeared the desired article. "We take—"

"Yes, we will take her with us. The officers here have no time to make inquiries or to assume charge of her; we cannot leave her here uncared for. So forward! But perhaps she will overburden you, dear Sabine? How say you?"

"God forbid! My heart is only too glad to take the burden."

"Well, then, let us move on."

Again sounded the warning bell. The remaining passengers crowded toward the open door, and soon our three travellers leaned back against the comfortable cushions of their carriage, and the train sped away through the dark night toward a distant country.

As often as Rosa opened her heavy eyes and met the gentle smile of Frau Sabine or the light of the stars glimmering through the carriage window, a new peace spread over her troubled little heart, the rosy lips smiled happily, and she murmured to herself the words of Frau Sabine: "We will all go to heaven when it pleases God."

The funeral of the grandmother was over, and all search after little Rosa still remained fruitless. The children sat toward evening together in the playroom, and Fritz's eyes

were red from much weeping; but his tears had fallen more for the loss of his sister than for his dead grandmother.

"I know how I can see Rosa again," he said, at last, drying his eyes, "if I may only go away alone to a quiet place where no one can see me."

"And of what use would that be?" asked Margareth. "What would you do then?"

"I know," said the boy, softly and mysteriously.

"Can you not tell us?" asked the curious little Elsie.

Fritz nodded:

"I would look for the messengers of the Lord; if I pray and beg, they will bring Rosa back to me. Do you know I did so once when I was almost frozen one very cold day? Then I fell asleep, and before I awakened God had sent his angels to me with warm clothes—yes, this coat which I

have on, and all my beautiful things. Ach! how happy I was that day!"

The sisters looked at each other and made no reply. But Elsie could never remain silent long; so she was the first to cry out:

"But, Fritz, how can you think that? Did you see the angels?"

"No, Elschen, for I was asleep."

"Shall I tell you how they appeared?" asked Elsie, starting up.

Fritz eagerly looked at her.

"Have you, then, seen them?" he uttered, incredulously. "Had they golden wings?"

"Listen, Fritz," said Margareth, in her thoughtful way. "Mother has said that we might at a suitable time tell you how your things came to you, and now I will."

"Ach, my Gretel! I pray you let me tell it," implored Elsie.

"Well, tell it, if you wish," agreed Margareth; and Elsie impulsively narrated the

story of the poor boy whom they had found sleeping in the lower hall, and how she and her brother and sister had filled his empty sack with the clothing that had been worn by their own dead brother.

"And now you know, Fritz," she concluded, laughingly, "that it was not the angels, but only Margareth, Hubert and I. You must not believe that the angels will come to you here, for mother says the angels are never seen on earth."

But Fritz was not convinced. He shook his head and said thoughtfully,

"But grandmother told us we must trust in God, for he would send his messengers—"

"Yes, Fritz," interrupted Margareth; "she may have said that, but she meant that he would hear our prayers and help us. But our mother says we must not believe that angels will come from heaven. She says all human beings may become God's messengers

if they will only obey his commands. If we see any one who is very poor or sick or in trouble, we know it is God's will for us to help; and we should all aid one another whenever we can. That evening you lay asleep on the floor looking so pale and tired we felt very sorry for you and asked our mother for warm clothes for you, and she gave them to us. Do you believe it now?"

"Do you still remember what was in the sack? Shall I tell you?" cried Hubert. "My rolls lay on top. Did you find them? Now do you believe?"

Fritz looked quite astonished, then said softly and sadly,

"Yes, it true; the rolls were there. I gave half to Rosa, but she would not eat. Ach! ach!" he exclaimed, bursting into tears; "then my prayers cannot help us, and I will never see Rosa again. Perhaps she is already with grandmother in heaven."

Elsie clasped her hands in horror:

"How can you say that, Fritz? Then she must be dead."

But Margareth comforted them with her decided and sensible conclusions:

"That is impossible. Why do you think only of sad things? Father would surely have heard if anything had happened to Rosa, for his messengers have made the closest search and inquiries.—No, Fritz, you may rest assured Rosa is not in heaven."

Yet, in spite of Margareth's firm conviction, on this very evening, as Rosa opened her eyes, it was with the blissful thought, "At last! At last I am in heaven!" She lay in a picturesque old chamber more beautiful than anything she had ever seen. The ceiling was high and vaulted; the single window formed a deep recess in the wall, and this alcove was filled with luxuriant green ivy,

which wound its branches about the pillars, crept over the white curtains and climbed to meet the fairy-figures frescoed on the ceiling. At the window stood an arm-chair, and beside this a table, upon which rested a shining gilded bird-cage. The arm-chair was occupied by an old lady with a lovely, gentle countenance, and she sat still with folded hands, as the grandmother in the little attic-room had often sat. Above, on the wall, hung a golden angel, who held a clock in his arms, and a beautiful lamp stood on a side-table, beneath a delicate porcelain shade on which was painted a wreath of roses with green leaves. The light was so faint that the soft, snowy bed in which Rosa lay stood in deep shadow.

Rosa dared not move. She lay quite still, with half-closed eyes, and wondered whether she were awake or dreaming. Now and then she looked at the angel and at the

grandmother and listened to the low ticking of the clock, and as again she glanced at the calm old face she folded her little hands and once more closed her eyes in sweet, refreshing slumber, in the blessed consciousness, "I am in heaven."

The grandmother noiselessly arose, approached the bed and gently laid her hand on the child's forehead:

"Thank God! the fever is gone. Now I will sleep peacefully after the long journey Poor lamb! But the Lord has cared for her, and he will help further. Ach! it almost seems our own little Golden-locks and the past are here again—the long years rolled away. How often have I thus stood beside her bed! The poor—the lost—" The old Frau pressed her hand over her moist eyes. "I wish we could keep the child here," she murmured; "the castle has grown so lonely, and there is nothing more for old Sabine to

do. That is bitter. But the baron wishes to speak to me; I had almost forgotten it in my sad thoughts." She left the room, passed through a corridor and knocked at the tall oaken door.

"Enter!" said the deep voice of the baron.

Sabine opened the door. This apartment of the castle also showed the same high-vaulted ceiling and the same massive columns, between which two high windows formed deep alcoves. But sombre and gloomy as the expression of the man who occupied it was the furniture of the room. Dark, heavy curtains hung before windows and doors. The carpet and the upholstery of the magnificently-carved antique furniture were also dark. The climbing plants and the flowers which gave to Sabine's room the appearance of a summer bower were all wanting here.

The baron arose to meet his cousin—his faithful friend of many years—and held out his hand:

"Welcome home, Sabine! How is the little one?"

"Much better, Herr Baron; she sleeps quietly, and smiles in her sleep as an angel. She is a very pretty child."

"And you would gladly keep her? You have not forgotten your love of children, Sabine." A smile lightened the grave face of the old Herr, but quickly disappeared again. "That may not be possible, dear friend, much as I wish it for your sake. I will write to Breslau this evening and give the police information of our foundling; then we will learn what relatives the child has."

"She has no parents."

"Let us wait; and should the little one prove quite friendless— Well, the build-

ing for the new Orphans' Home will be finished in the spring, and as soon as I succeed in providing a suitable matron your charge shall be the first to whom its doors shall be opened."

"There is plenty of space in my room for the child," said Sabine, eagerly, "and it would make me very happy if she could remain here."

The baron smiled again:

"I thought so. I well know that you love nothing in the world—not even your flowers—so well as the helpless little human plants. If I could spare you, Sabine, I would present to you the Orphans' Home, and you might there for many years nurse and instruct to your heart's content; but you know I have now none who would so trouble themselves about my weal or woe as you, you true faithful friend, and therefore you must stay in the castle."

Tears rolled over the face of the old Frau, and with a trembling voice she said quickly,

"How could I ever go away or leave you? How could I forget all your goodness to me, Herr Baron? You and your whole house are my first thoughts ever. Could I forget the happy years that I have passed here and forsake you now in your trouble and loneliness? No, never! The old Sabine remains; here is her post, and she leaves it only when God shall call her away."

The baron held out his hand, and his own eyes filled with tears:

"And since all our loved ones have been taken from us—all for whom we cared, dear Sabine—we will still not become melancholy and useless dwellers on God's earth. One may always find something to do to benefit his fellow-men. We must meet the coming days bravely and cheerfully, Sabine, even if

the old castle now appears doubly lonesome. Good-night." He turned away, and Sabine, with a gentle "Good-night," left the room.

The baron stood still before a window and looked out into the dark night. Myriads of stars shone in the high heavens, and with an expression of painful longing the baron gazed upward into its vast and mysterious depths.

"So richly blest," he murmured, "and now so utterly bereft! But thy will, O God, be done!"

The next morning burst forth in brilliant sunshine, which stole into Frau Sabine's chamber and flooded it with golden light. The bird in its gilded bower trilled forth its morning song; the golden angel grew more dazzling beneath the sun's rays, and the little clock in his arms kept on its soothing tic-tac, but the pretty lamp with its flower-

wreathed shade had disappeared from the table, and a handsome coffee-service, with fragrant hot biscuit, filled its place.

Little Rosa had awakened; she sat up in bed and looked around her in amazement. The door opened, and Sabine entered and came up to the child's bed:

"Good-morning, my child, good-morning! The blue eyes look quite different to-day. Are you well, my dear?"

"Yes, quite well," answered Rosa, shyly. "Ach! I have dreamt such a beautiful dream!"

Frau Sabine lovingly stroked Rosa's cheek and kissed her:

"It is beautiful here—even as a dream, little one; and you will be happy here."

"May I stay with you, and may Fritz come too?" asked Rosa.

"'Fritz'? Is Fritz your brother?"

"Yes, surely. Ach! what will he say to

my running away, and Frau Hanna, and all the strange people—ach!—and Elsie?"

"Have you run away? That was not right, my child. And how sick you have been! But now let us stop talking. Here; drink a glass of milk and eat some zwieback;" and Frau Sabine carefully attended to the child's breakfast. "What is your name?" she asked.

"Rosa."

"'Rosa'?" exclaimed the Frau, in surprise. "How strange! The dear, dear name!" She kissed the child again, and watched with delight as Rosa ate her breakfast with hearty enjoyment, stopping every few minutes to look wonderingly about her.

Then, as Rosa assured the old lady that she felt perfectly well, she was allowed to leave her bed; and when dressed, Frau Sabine drew aside the curtains, took the child in her arms and walked to the window:

"Look out, Rosa: is it not beautiful here?"

Rosa uttered a cry of pleasure and clapped her hands.

"Yes, it is indeed a lovely picture," said Sabine, half sadly; "and when the spring comes, then it will be still more beautiful. Then will all these plains of gleaming snow become green meadows adorned with a thousand flowers; and the forest yonder, with its tall trees crowned with snow, will hide within its shadows numberless lovely singing-birds, and the leaves will whisper and rustle and the whole air be fragrant with the scent of blossoms."

Rosa had put her arm about Sabine's neck and nestled closely to her. Her dear pious grandmother and Sabine seemed, to her bewildered senses, to be one and the same person, and she softly whispered, looking earnestly into her eyes,

"Are we both in heaven together?"

"No, child, we are on earth; but if we love God and all people, if we do nothing wrong, then are we living here as pure and happy life as that in heaven. Are we not, little Rosa?" she said smiling down into the child's face.

Rosa nodded happily, as though she understood what the old Frau meant.

"Yes, as in heaven," she repeated, with beaming eyes; "but Fritz too must be there."

CHAPTER IV.

JOY AND SORROW.

THE Frau Kommerzienrathin Willmers went to call on her two friends, but found only Seraphine at home.

"Yes, dear Marie; she is as well as usual," said Seraphine as she assisted her guest to lay aside her hat and mantle. "Rough on the outside, but good and tender at heart, she has been unable to rest since last evening, and is continually on the lookout for some trace of the little one."

"She will hardly succeed," returned Frau Marie, with a sigh, "for we have done all that is possible. The disappearance of the child lies on my heart like a weight, and I would give much if we could but find her again."

"It is dreadful that we must experience only misfortunes," complained Seraphine, in her melancholy tones; "my sister will truly make herself sick with anxiety. But listen! There she is."

"Yes, here she is," uttered Theodolinde, dejectedly, entering the room, "and she returns as wise as she went away. Ach, dear Marie! you here? What a pleasant surprise! I did not see you in the dim light. You are a welcome guest. Do you know where I have been? To the neighbor of the poor grandmother—to Frau Hanna. But it is no trifling matter to climb those four flights of steps, especially when one is suffering so badly as I am."

"Do sit down," begged Seraphine as she arranged sofa-cushion and footstool for her sister.

"You may rest assured Frau Hanna will immediately bring us news if she learns any-

thing in regard to the child; why trouble yourself to go to her?" said Frau Marie.

"Yes, but, my dear, I am interested in this woman, who lives up close under the roof, not much better than a swallow that swings between heaven and earth, and yet is contented and cheerful in her poverty. It is wonderful. I have found no trace of the child, it is true, but I have seen Sera, that in the world there are people much poorer than ourselves."

"Well, my love, that *is* a discovery," said the Kommerzienrathin, smiling. "I have often begged you to look at the various conditions of life around you. When we see what endless misery, pain and trouble are on earth, we may well ask why God has favored us so much more than the thousands of suffering ones and cease our own complaints. Rather should we thank him, instead, for the undeserved blessings which we enjoy."

"Well, *we* cannot exactly complain of too much good-fortune," said Theodolinde, in her bitter way.

"No, dear Marie; we have now for twenty years wrestled and struggled and—"

"But if I asked of what great misfortune you complain, you would hardly know what to answer."

"Not 'hardly,'" interrupted Theodolinde. "Just think what it is to be accustomed to luxury from childhood, then suddenly to be compelled to practise the barest economy; to be transplanted from a lovely home in the country, where we could wander through, forest, field and meadow all our own, to a tiny house within the city walls; and to have added to our other troubles that of physical suffering. Is not that misfortune enough?"

"You picture it too darkly; widespread or contracted relations should have no influence on the true inner life of human be-

ings. Hundreds of thousands live in the city who would much rather pass their time in the country, but who, in spite of that, are quite happy. And your physical sufferings, dear Theodolinde, cannot surely be so great, for you appear strong and healthy."

Seraphine looked at their friend in affright, for she knew that nothing angered her sister more than to be told she looked healthy. Theodolinde, however, only contracted her forehead and said somewhat vehemently,

"Appearances are quite deceptive. If you only knew what I have suffered to-day! I nearly died of asthma."

"You will outgrow it in eighty or ninety years," jested the Kommerzienrathin. "But I have settled it in my mind that you both must grow more cheerful, and I hope I will yet have the pleasure of seeing my desire fulfilled."

"How good you are!" said Seraphine, much

moved. "You have always had patience with us when we have wrestled and struggled with our trouble and distress. I believe we have not yet thanked you for the good strengthening wine you sent here while we were with you on New Year's evening. You are a friend in the true sense of the word, and the only one we have."

Theodolinde pressed the hand of the Kommerzienrathin and endeavored to conceal her emotion by a smile.

"You will in time grow weary of helping such discouraging people, dear Marie. How difficult it will be for us to find a suitable dwelling! If we could only have one with a tree before our window or a little green near its walls!"

"If we only might!" chimed in Seraphine. "As the Swiss dies of homesickness for his mountains, so pine we of longing for God's free nature. And then, with no especial

duty, one feels quite useless on earth. When I look across at the children's school over yonder, I often envy the teacher who has charge of the little ones, and sometimes wonder if it would not have been better for us to have undertaken something of the kind."

"'Us'?" repeated Theodolinde, in the utmost astonishment. "How do such strange ideas get into your head? Do you think that I am in the smallest degree suited to have patience with such a restless little army?"

"No, not you, but I, Linda; I would have patience. When I see how quietly and earnestly the little girls go to school with their satchels on their arms, and when through the windows I observe how they bend over their desks with glowing faces or turn toward their teacher with bright, interested countenances, then would I gladly be among

them; it would make me very happy. You, dear Linda, might care, meanwhile, for our domestic arrangements, as you now do; and when the dear little things had gone merrily home, we could cosily sit together and have much to relate to each other."

"Seraphine is quite right," said Frau Marie, who had gazed with astonishment on her usually sad and silent friend.

"Air-castles! Soap-bubbles!" growled Theodolinde. "It would be quite impossible in this house, where we have but one room besides our sleeping-apartment, and we could not pay the rent of a larger house."

"Yes, it is impossible," sighed the younger sister, dejectedly. "There is no use for us on earth.

"Not so, dear friend," cried the Kommerzienrathin; "no one is useless who does not want to be so. You are necessary to each other, are loved by me and my family, and

can, if you only will, help many a poor fellow-being and comfort and encourage many who are sad."

"Yes," uttered the elder sister, eagerly; "I have to-day thought of an old but warm jacket in the wardrobe that will make that poor washerwoman more comfortable.—What do you think, Sera? Shall we not give it to her?"

"Yes, gladly, Linda; and my old woollen shawl may also be useful to her."

There was a knock at the door, but, without waiting for a response, it was suddenly opened, and the children of the Kommerzienrathin, accompanied by Fritz, burst in so stormily that the mother cried gravely and reprovingly,

"My children!"

"Do not scold, dear mother," entreated Elsie; and she continued in eager, breathless haste: "Only think! Rosa is found!"

"Yes, Rosa is found!" they shouted, in chorus; and then all began to talk at once, until one word could hardly be distinguished from another.

"Be quiet, my children!" commanded the mother. "First politely bid your aunts 'Good-evening;' then all remain silent while Margareth tells the story."

The aunts hastened to return the greeting of their little friends, almost as excited as the children, and impatiently awaited the story.

"Where has the little crab hidden herself? How did they find her?" cried Theodolinde.

"At the castle!"

"On the field!"

"At the mountains!"

Again sounded all the voices together.

"How can any one learn what you mean?" said Aunt Theodolinde; and Margareth now spoke earnestly:

"All be quiet and let me talk.—Father has just received a letter from the police—"

"Ach! Grete, dear Grete, let me tell it," begged Elsie; and she went on quickly: "The letter said that Rosa was found almost dead in the road, not far from the city; and a sleigh came up, and they took her in, and carried her away a hundred miles from—"

"And they travelled on the railroad all that night, and the whole of the next day. I wish it had been myself," interrupted Hubert.

"And Rosa—my dear Rosa!—is in a castle, and I will soon see her again," cried Fritz, with a sob of joy.

"But only think, dear mother! The gentleman who found Rosa is—"

"Oh, guess, guess! Pray guess!" cried the little chatterboxes together.

"But, my children, how can we guess?" said the mother. "Who is it?"

"His name is the same as that of our aunts," laughed Elsie, merrily.

"Is not that wonderful?" asked Margareth.

"What? How?" questioned the sisters.

"Yes, it is true," said Margareth. "The gentleman is the baron Von Ebendorf, and he lives in an old castle in the mountains. I believe the estate is called Tannenwiese."

"'Baron von Ebendorf'!" repeated Theodolinde; and she walked across the room in her astonishment. "It is almost incredible. We have not heard of him for years, and now through this little kobalt! Ach! how glad I am! It carries me back to the beautiful days of my childhood."

"Is he related to you?" asked the Kommerzienrathin.

"That is plain enough—a cousin on our father's side," said Seraphine. "We saw much of each other as children. He has great wealth."

"But he was always self-willed and

haughty. He has not thought of his poor cousins for many years, and yet has experienced much trouble himself," said Theodolinde. "How it interests and agitates me!" She stepped up to a mirror and carefully observed herself. "Dear Sera, quickly dissolve for me a soothing-powder in sugar-water. The blood has gone to my head; I have always said I incline to apoplexy."

Seraphine tremblingly hastened to fulfil her sister's request.

The Kommerzienrathin arose:

"Come, dear friends, and spend the evening with me. You will thus more clearly learn all that has happened, and a walk in the evening air this beautiful winter weather will prove better than a soothing-powder."

Seraphine longingly glanced toward her sister.

"Will it be possible?" she asked, anxiously.

"Oh yes; I am already better.—Here, children, are some good apples, red as your old aunt Linda; take them with you in return for your good news.—You may believe, Marie, it is as though a hundredweight had been lifted from my heart, and this evening I truly feel happier than in many years."

The little party was soon on its way, but the children left their elders behind and swiftly sped home to talk over the wonderful news and to celebrate their joy by a merry game in the playroom.

"If only I knew," said Elsie, with a meditative air, as she walked up and down the room bearing her favorite doll, Seraphine, who to-night, in consequence of the great excitement, could not be soothed to sleep—"if I only knew why dear Rosa ran away from us!—Can you guess?" she said to Hubert, who sat near.

Hubert mysteriously nodded his head:

"Yes, truly, I could tell you; but you chatter so, Elsie, and Fritz begged me not to tell."

"Why not? I repeat nothing that I should not," said Elsie, indignantly.

"Well, you see, Elsie, Fritz says his sister is so timid that Aunt Theodolinde frightened her when she talked so loud and fast and said Rosa should be put in the cellar."

"Ach!" exclaimed Elsie, in surprise. "But, Hubert, how could any one be afraid of Aunt Theodolinde? Mother says she is so good."

"Yes, Elschen, we knew that; but Rosa did not."

"And, you see, dear Elsie," said Margareth, always ready with a moral, "that it is well for us to accustom ourselves to a gentle, quiet manner like our mother's and—"

"And Sister Greta's? Is it not true?" laughed the child.

"Well, yes," assented Margareth; "I

would gladly become as our dear mother. Is that wrong?"

"No—oh no! but I am as lively and impulsive as papa; is that wrong?"

Margareth kissed the rosy little mouth and laughed as she turned to Fritz:

"Tell me, Fritz, why you are brushing your clothes so carefully. Are you going out?"

Fritz reddened and laid down the clothes-brush:

"I was only getting ready, for the gentleman might come to take me to Rosa."

"But you will not go as soon as you think, Fritz. Are you not happy here? Wait patiently."

"Oh, dear Margareth, do not be angry," begged Fritz. "I would gladly stay here with you all, and I have learned to love you so much that every evening I pray that God will bless you for your goodness to me; but

if you knew how I love Rosa, my dear sister Rosa—how I have grieved for her, and each night, as it grew dark, have wondered, 'Where is Rosa now?' Ach!" He burst into tears, and Elsie tenderly put her arm around him, saying,

"Do not cry, Fritz. We know how you love Rosa; and when they send for you to go to her, I will help you brush and pack, that you may be ready as quickly as possible."

"And I will give you my box of cuirassiers to remember me by," said Hubert. "But it would be much better if you were to stay here."

"Yes, Fritz; that is all that I meant," apologized Margareth. "You must be happy to-day, and not sad."

Fritz dried his eyes and smiled at Margareth.

"I *am* happy to-day," he said—"happier

still than on that evening—do you remember?—when the angels of the Lord—"

"Hush! hush!" said Margareth; and she laid her hand over his lips. "You know you must not say that."

"When the dear God heard my prayer and answered it," amended Fritz. "And now has he again listened, and Rosa is found; and I will soon see her. My dear, dear Rosa! I could leap for joy;" and he embraced the children and danced up and down the room.

Hubert joined him, and Elsie at last declared that it was impossible for her dear Seraphine to sleep in such a noise, and that she must take her to another room. To tell the truth, however, she was glad of an excuse to join the older party and listen to what they were saying on the all-absorbing subject, the discovery of Rosa.

The Kommerzienrath had just finished

reading the baron's letter, in which he declared that if no near relatives or friends claimed the two orphan children he would take them himself and be responsible for their education, as he was childless.

"Then we will give the children to him," said Herr Willmers as he folded the letter. "A home without children lacks sunshine, and God has already blessed us."

"Cousin Friedrich *had* children," said Aunt Theodolinde, "but I think the daughters died."

"The son also," added Seraphine; "he met with an accident while hunting. You have forgotten it. We read it in the *Times* several years ago."

"True. Then his home must be very lonely. But I never thought that proud, stern man would wish to educate a couple of poor children. It is wonderful how people change."

Theodolinde disapprovingly shook her head:

"If I live to be a hundred years old, people must still find me as I am now."

"No, dear friend," said Frau Marie; "the old tree grows and puts forth new branches, even as the young tree—more slowly and imperceptibly, it is true, but still it grows. And so it is also with us. Who could, or would, rest satisfied with himself and cease striving to grow better and wiser? Who knows what experience has made the heart of your cousin more gentle and charitable?"

"The baron desires information concerning the relatives and the past lives of the children," reminded Seraphine. "Has any one knowledge of the family of the little ones?"

"There is not much to be known," said the Kommerzienrathin, "and it is a sad story. The grandmother of the children was the widow of a country schoolmaster; her only

son was a missionary, and for his sake she left the Fatherland and accompanied him and his young wife to America. Later, while out on a pleasure voyage, the young couple were drowned, leaving to the old mother the two young children and but small provision for them. She returned to her native land broken in health and weakened in mind by her troubles. She cared for nothing on earth but the children, and for years her thoughts and her conversation were more of heaven than of this world; therefore the children heard so much of spiritual things —which they could not understand—that they almost expected visible angels to come to them in their little attic-chamber and bear them all away to heaven. In earlier years, when the children were quite young, Frau Hanna had served the little household; but when the grandmother became blind and was at last compelled to sell everything in

order to provide for herself and the children, she moved up into the attic-room; and this winter their distress was so great that Frau Hanna proposed that Fritz should start out to earn something by selling sand."

"But had they no relatives on the mother's side?" asked Seraphine, whose tender heart had long since ceased to consider whether they were beggar-children or not.

"Frau Hanna was unable to say; the grandmother was a reserved woman, and had told her nothing more."

"The poor washerwoman related the story to me to-day," said Theodolinde; "and it is truly a great piece of fortune for the children, and a wonderful providence, that they have, so to say, run right into the hands of Cousin Ebendorf and given him an opportunity to do good. How little did I think that this obstinate young crab would come to live at

Tannenwiese! I was there but once, yet I remember it as a dream of Paradise, so wonderfully beautiful are the country and the castle."

"It is strange how one thread joins itself to another," remarked the Kommerzienrathin, thoughtfully.

"But my Frau began the weaving of this plan of Providence," laughed Herr Willmers; "for had she not early planted in the hearts of our children the seeds of warm love to all human beings, they would not so deeply have felt the distress of the poor boy; he might have gone away unobserved, and I would not have been so moved by the familiar sight of my own child's clothing as to interest myself especially for them."

"Aunt Seraphine," whispered Elsie, "look how peacefully my doll sleeps; she no longer opens her eyes. And surely she must dream very sweetly, for she smiles in her sleep."

"Perhaps her dreams are of golden butterflies."

"Do you still remember that, Aunt Sera?" exclaimed the child, delightedly. "Oh, that was a lovely day! It was my birthday, and so many roses bloomed to celebrate it! and on the prettiest rose was the butterfly. Do you remember?"

"Yes, and Elschen wanted a little cage to put the butterfly in, that she might keep him for ever," said Aunt Seraphine.

"As a souvenir of the day, and because it was so beautiful," replied Elsie; "but papa said that would be too sad for the butterfly, so he laid it in ether, and now I have it still in my finest casket on a soft little bed of white cotton. It is as pretty as ever; and when my dolls are very good, I let them peep at my golden butterfly. Aunt Sera, I can repeat the verses that you wrote for me on that day. Shall I say them?"

"Yes, Elschen; I will hear them with pleasure."

So Elsie merrily declaimed:

"Golden butterfly
In the sunshine,
On a rose-leaf,
Would thou wert mine!

"Golden butterfly
In the sunshine,
Fly not away:
Stay and be mine!

"Golden butterfly
In the sunshine,
Like precious stones
Thy wings do shine.

"Golden butterfly,
In the summer air,
Art more to childish hearts
Than jewels rare."

The evening passed pleasantly to old and young, and the next day the Kommerzienrath

wrote to the baron Von Ebendorf stating that the children might be transferred to his care.

Soon after, a second letter arrived from Tannenwiese; this deeply moved the Kommerzienrath and his wife, and it was decided that Fritz should stay in Breslau until spring, and then be sent to Tannenwiese.

Truly, it seemed to poor Fritz that he could hardly wait until then to see his Rosa again: it was an eternity. But the days passed by one after the other in industrious study and merry games; weeks and months grew out of the days; and suddenly the first snowdrops, crocuses and tiny blades of grass began to peep out of the earth, and more strongly the warm sunbeams announced each day: "The spring is at the door."

Happily and peacefully as the winter had passed in the home of the Willmers, it had

brought unforeseen trouble to Aunt Theodolinde and Aunt Seraphine, and all the dismal predictions of the elder sister in regard to an unfortunate year seemed about to be fulfilled. The little capital on whose interest the sisters depended for their income was wholly lost through the failure of a bank. Theodolinde was so upset by the news, and thrown into such a state of excitement, that she declared her last hour had come, for a heart-trouble had already developed, and Seraphine vainly "wrestled and struggled" to keep up under this new misfortune. She became nervous and weak and sank into a low, dangerous fever. Now, to her surprise, Theodolinde discovered that Seraphine had long been a greater sufferer than herself. She forgot herself and her ailments and became unwearied in her devotion day and night to her sick sister; even the thought of their utter poverty was thrust into the back-

ground by the fear of losing her loved one. The Kommerzienrathin assisted them in every possible way, daily sent by the children some refreshing delicacy, and by her presence and advice encouraged Theodolinde, who, often as she had maintained that she was the most unfortunate being in the world, now suddenly became quite patient, when a truly great sorrow had fallen upon her.

"It is remarkable," Frau Marie often said to her husband, "how gentle Theodolinde is in comparison with other days, and how seldom she thinks of her own imaginary weaknesses. I believe this misfortune will prove a blessing in disguise."

"Yes, truly," said the Kommerzienrath, with a smile; "there are old children as well as young, and the old must often be educated, if only the right schoolmaster—in the shape of Experience—knocks at their hearts."

"But what will the poor things do in the future?" asked his wife.

"I have already thought much of that, and I must say as yet I do not know. Willing as I am still further to help them, I dare not permanently undertake the responsibility of their maintenance."

"Would it be well to inform the baron Von Ebendorf of the unfortunate circumstances of his relatives? He seems to be a noble, benevolent man, and would perhaps settle a pension on them if he knew of the ill-fortune that has overtaken them."

"But would they accept charity from a relative who has not troubled himself about them for so many years? Besides, the pension would be but a trifle," said Herr Willmers.

"You are right; they would not accept it. We must find a position for them somewhere, and I can help increase their income unknown

to them, as I have already done," said Frau Marie, with a satisfied smile.

The Kommerzienrath embraced his wife and lovingly patted her cheek as he would that of a favorite child. She saw that his eyes were moist.

"Thou dear one!" he said; "may all our children resemble thee! Then will they too in heart be as much in heaven as on earth."

CHAPTER V.

AT TANNENWIESE.

IT was May. The towering firs between which lay the castle and the village of Tannenwiese, and which framed and guarded them as venerable sentinels, had long since doffed their slumber-robes of snow and ice; the meadow-lands were covered with a delicate green and adorned with a thousand different wild-flowers; in the castle-gardens trees and shrubs blossomed and fragrance filled the air, and soft mysterious rustling and the songs of birds and distant echoes; and the sunbeams drifted through the forest, over mountain, valley and meadow, and hearts were light and beat joyously in hope of what the spring should bring.

Frau Sabine and Rosa, who now clung to her kind friend with great affection, had wandered toward the forest. It was late in the afternoon, and they sat down to rest beneath an ancient fir tree whose widespreading branches drooped over them like a sheltering roof.

"Will the sun never go down to-day?" exclaimed Rosa. "I never knew a day to last so long."

"It seems long, my child, only because you are so impatient. Gather some flowers and make a pretty bouquet to welcome the dear uncle and brother."

"Oh yes!" cried Rosa; and she began to pluck primroses and anemones, but came back in a few minutes, nestled closely to the old Frau and said eagerly, "I wonder what Fritz will say, dear aunt, when he sees this beautiful forest and the castle and the great garden and how happy I am?"

"He will be happy too, my lamb."

"Yes, but how he will look and what he will say! Will he scold me for wishing to run away to heaven?"

"Indeed, my little Rosa, that was very thoughtless of you."

"But, dear aunt, the Frau was so cross! You would hardly believe it. She looked at me so"—Rosa tried to draw her pretty little face into a dark scowl—"and she was angry. Ach! I was frightened."

Frau Sabine smiled.

"Do you know the difference between a chestnut and a walnut?" she asked.

"Yes, surely, Aunt Sabine."

"Well, you see, dear Rosa, the chestnut has a prickly bur, so that we cannot take it in our hands without feeling its sharp points; but look within, and there is the shining brown nut, and in its hard shell is the sweet kernel which we are very glad to have and

which tastes so good. Now, it is quite possible that this Frau who seemed so harsh to you still has a warm, loving heart. When you grow older, my child, you will see how that may be."

"But, dear aunt, will the sun never set?" said the little one, restlessly. "Please tell me how long we must wait."

"Not very long," said the old Frau, cheerfully, as she looked at her watch; and, taking the impatient child by the hand, she continued: "Let us walk home slowly and see if all is ready for the dear travellers, and before we think it they will be there too."

But they had but left the forest-shadows and trodden the meadow-path—had scarcely reached the avenue which led to the castle door—when Rosa cried in joyful accents,

"I see the carriage! They are coming! They are coming! Ach! my dear Fritz is coming!" and she so quickly ran toward the

approaching carriage that Frau Sabine could not keep up with her.

"Rosa, stay in the path or you will be run over," she cried, anxiously.

Rosa heard and stood still by the roadside, glowing and trembling with joy and excitement.

The coachman, who had seen the little figure, stopped the carriage; the baron alighted, and with a cry of rapture Rosa threw herself into the arms of her brother, who followed him.

"Rosa, dear Rosa!"

"Ach, Fritz, Fritz!"

They could utter no more, but tears streamed down the little faces; and the children kissed each other again and again, until the baron said jestingly,

"Well, little Rosa, have you no welcome for Uncle Fritz?"

Rosa instantly turned to the smiling baron,

but suddenly stood still as though turned to stone, gazing with terrified eyes into the face of Fraulein Theodolinde, who stood beside the baron. Was it possible that the angry Frau had followed her here to punish her for her wilfulness? Or was she not the same Frau? Yes, it was she; but, without giving Rosa time to think, she lifted the child in her arms, pressed a hearty kiss on the rosy mouth and said in her deep voice,

"You little gypsy! I have followed you even here. So it is when one is naughty. Will you give me your hand now, little sweet-brier?"

Rosa beseechingly looked at Aunt Sabine, who had now joined the group, and then shyly into the dark eyes of the lady, but —oh wonder!—bright tears stood in those eyes and the lips were curved in a tender smile.

The child feared no longer; with a bash-

ful smile she confidently placed her little hand in that of Theodolinde and whispered softly,

"Please do not be angry with Rosa any longer."

The carriage went forward, and the party followed in lively conversation. Frau Sabine had known the cousins of the baron in former years, and now many half-forgotten incidents of their happy youth were eagerly recalled.

"You must ask Cousin Fritz how it happened that we surprised you so to-day, dear Sabine," said Theodolinde: "I must confess that it seems but a dream to me to find myself here."

"To me also," added Seraphine, who looked pale and delicate, but much happier than in the old days. "Ach! how beautiful is Tannenwiese!" she exclaimed, impulsively.

Delightful indeed they all found it as they

sat in the garden-seat at the festively-adorned table and talked over the past and the future. The glass doors were open, and the fresh spring air bore in the scent of many blossoms.

Fritz had won the heart of the baron in the few days they had been together, so that the Herr had written to Sabine to have a room in the castle prepared for him. He would bring, instead, for the Home, two orphans, although not quite so youthful as Fritz and Rosa.

Sabine had shaken her head over the letter. Why need the baron seek in a distant city for children? Were there not enough friendless ones in the country around them? Now, as she looked at the two sisters, the riddle was solved.

After supper the baron led his cousins to the pretty building just beyond the castle-gardens, and delivered its keys and responsibil-

ities into their hands, expressing his great pleasure in being able to offer them this interesting charge and hoping they would find a peaceful and happy home here for the remainder of their days.

Tears and smiles struggled for the mastery in Theodolinde's countenance.

"There is no question as to happiness," she said, "and you well know, dear Ebendorf, that your unexpected appearance and your kind proposition to give us a sphere of usefulness here was a deliverance out of great trouble and anxiety."

"Yes, and we will wrestle and struggle, dear cousin, to prove our gratitude."

"No, no, Seraphine! there must be no 'wrestling and struggling,'" laughed the baron. "Peace and contentment only shall reign here."

When the sisters were alone, they examined the beautiful and comfortable abode, in

whose lower apartments twelve children could be pleasantly accommodated, besides the teacher and the necessary appurtenances, while the upper story, with its wonderful outlook on the mountains, was set apart for the sisters.

Theodolinde was in a gentle flutter of happiness—to her a hitherto unknown state. She embraced her sister and drew her to the window. Both gazed with swelling hearts into the quiet beauty of the landscape that shone mistily through the spring night.

"You have been restored to me, Sera," murmured Theodolinde; "a home has fallen from heaven more beautiful than anything we dreamt it possible to possess again. Oh, sister, how can we sufficiently thank God for all this happiness?"

"By growing better, dear Linda. Marie was right: the messengers of the Lord

truly wander on this earth to comfort and assist the unfortunate. Cousin Fritz is one of them, and in the future we also will belong to them. We have thought too much of ourselves and our own troubles; Cousin Ebendorf has suffered more than we guessed."

Theodolinde nodded thoughtfully.

"Has Sabine spoken to you of our cousin's troubles?" she asked.

"Yes. When she led me to her room to rest and we were alone, she begged me not to ask the baron about his children unless he first spoke of them himself. His son, just grown up, was killed while hunting, soon after the death of the mother. The eldest daughter married a minister and accompanied her husband, who was sent as a missionary to a distant country. They never returned, and in spite of every inquiry nothing has been heard of them for years; communica-

tion with Europe was at that time difficult and irregular. Probably they too are dead —perhaps murdered by the savages. The youngest daughter was the only one left, and she was delicate; the baron and Sabine spent years with her in Italy endeavoring to nurse her back to health, but she died during the past winter, and was buried there."

"Poor child!" sighed Theodolinde.

"And yet, Linda, he must rest peacefully to-night, when he has prepared such happiness for others that we bless and pray for him."

Theodolinde leaned her head against her sister's shoulder and burst into tears.

"What is it, dear sister? Are you ill?" cried Seraphine, anxiously.

"No, no! Do not be troubled about me; you have cared too long, dear Sera. Let me weep; it will do me good. I realize how much patience God has had with me, for I

have never tried to bring happiness to a single human heart—not even yours, dear sister."

"How can you say that?" said Sera, touched by this confession. "Have you not nursed me day and night with perfect self-sacrifice?"

"Yes, after I had tormented you almost to death with my everlasting complaints and my imaginary ailments. Forgive me, dear sister."

Seraphine drew her sister away from the window.

"Come help your abused sister make her toilet for the night," she said, jestingly.

"How forgetful I am! Dear heart, you must be deadly tired; let us hasten to rest," she exclaimed as she bore a light into the cosy sleeping apartment.

A short prayer together, a kiss, and all was dark and silent in the Orphans' Home.

Fritz and Rosa had meanwhile a thousand things to ask and to relate to each other. Fritz brought letters from Margareth, Hubert and Elsie to his little sister, and all three told of their grief and anxiety when Rosa disappeared. Even the Princess and the court-ladies had become quite sick from fright, wrote Elsie; and Margareth and Hubert had a lecture already prepared for her when they should come in the holidays to Tannenwiese with their mamma—for they had promised the Herr Baron they would all come—but she would kiss the little Rosa and be very good to her.

"Oh, Fritz," cried Rosa, joyfully, "will they all truly come here?"

"Yes, they are coming; and if the country pleases him, the Herr Kommerzienrath will give up his business and buy a place in the neighborhood. Then they will all leave the great city and come here to live. Only

think, Rosa! Uncle Willmers is sixty years old; he may well leave his work and rest in the quiet country."

"That would be too good!" said Rosa, with delight; "I will be so glad to see them, especially dear Elsie."

Aunt Sabine had long ago warned them that it was bedtime; she now declared that if they did not go with her they might spend the night in the garden-seat, and with much laughter the two children followed her.

"Do you know, Fritz, that when I lay for the first time in that pretty bed and looked around me here in Aunt Sabine's room, I thought I was in heaven? Does it seem so to you?" asked Rosa.

Fritz gravely shook his head:

"No, Rosa; heaven can have no ceiling or walls, for then the angels could not fly."

"Yes, but outside, where there are neither walls nor ceiling, is not heaven, Uncle Fritz

said. Where, then, is heaven? Do you know?"

"No, Rosa; I cannot find out that yet."

"But Aunt Sabine says we may be in heaven even here, Fritz."

"Ach! I do not believe that."

"Neither do I," whispered the little girl.

Aunt Sabine, who had been inspecting the night-fastenings of the castle, now entered. The children kissed each other, bade a soft "Good-night," and soon two pairs of bright eyes were closed in happy slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HOLIDAYS.

THERE were lovely twilight hours and talks in the glowing western avenue, in the jasmine-bower of the castle-garden, or up on the mountain-side beneath the roof formed by the dry roots of the ancient fir trees. Elsie each day repeated over and over again that there was no place in the whole world more beautiful than Tannenwiese, and Margareth and Hubert emphatically confirmed her declaration.

The Kommerzienrathin Willmers and her children had already spent three weeks at the castle, and Frau Sabine felt herself growing young again amid the frolicsome group and happy in the society of Frau Marie, the

reports of whose goodness had not been exaggerated, although the baron as well as Theodolinde and Seraphine had spread the fame of her gentleness and virtues in Tannenwiese long before her arrival.

The finest summer weather favored the plans of the young people, and every day some expedition was made over the neighboring mountains or into the wonderful and mysterious depths of the forest.

At evening all gathered together in the castle-garden, at the garden-seat or before the door of the Orphans' Home, where an airy canopy swung above the green grass; and Seraphine, as often as the weather was pleasant, gathered her little pupils about her in the open air and gave them an hour's instruction or read to them from some attractive story-book. Margareth, Elsie and Rosa, notwithstanding the fact that it was holiday-time with them, punctually joined this entertain-

ment, much interested in the developments unfolded each evening.

On this Saturday our trio of little girls and three diminutive waifs surrounded Aunt Seraphine, while the Kommerzienrathin, Sabine and Theodolinde had gone to the neighboring city to make some purchases. The two boys were in the baron's study.

"Now lay aside your games," said Herr von Ebendorf as with clear strokes the clock on the mantle announced the sixth hour, "and Fritz will read us something suited to the close of this last day of the week."

"May I read from grandmother's prayer-book, which Aunt Willmers brought to us?" asked Fritz.

"Certainly, my boy. Where is it?"

"Rosa wished to keep it. It lies on her bureau; I will bring it quickly;" and the next moment he was out of the room.

"Before we started on our journey to

Tannenwiese," said Hubert, confidentially, to the baron, "mother went to see Frau Hanna, who is very poor and is now quite sick. They gave her, it is true, all that the grandmother left in her room, but that was very little; and she can no longer work and earn anything for herself. Papa kept only the books and the letters that were found there, but they were not of much consequence. A short time ago Frau Hanna found the prayer-book in a dress-pocket and gave it to mother for Fritz and Rosa. It is but a shabby little book not in use now."

Yes, truly it was old and worn, but Fritz carried it as carefully as though it were a priceless treasure.

Hubert, who was inclined to tease, looked mischievous.

"Is it glass, Fritz," he whispered, "that you handle it so tenderly?"

Fritz reddened, but caressingly passed his

hand over the faded binding, and said earnestly,

"Ach, Hubert! how often has grandmother held this book in her hands! Whenever I see it, I think of her. My father used it when a child, and grandmother said that our mother had often read to her beautiful, comforting hymns from it. You have your father and your mother, Hubert, but we had only our grandmother; and she was so good —ach! so good!"

The bright tears stood in the boy's eyes, and the baron, who sat at a table reading, but who had listened to the whispered conversation of the children, softly laid his hand on Fritz's head and said,

"Read us, then, an evening hymn from the good grandmother's book."

Fritz read:

"'The world has gone to rest,
And all is still;

The birds within their nests
Have ceased to trill;
I too, without a fear,
Seek my bed warm:
God's angels watching near
Keep me from harm.

"'Dear God, who fills the night
With moonlight and bright stars,
Who leads us ever right,
Whose hearts thine are,
As the fair stars that shine,
Within our breasts
May thy dear love divine
Send peace and rest!

"'Thy love shall go with me
To Slumberland;
Thine angels' wings I see,
So near they stand,
To guard from passing thought
Or dream of wrong
And banish from me aught
But heavenly song.

"'I thank thee for this day,
For sunlight fair;
I trust my future way
Unto thy care.
My prayer at morn shall be,
At setting sun,
That evermore in me
Thy will be done.'"

"Amen!" said Fritz, gently.

The baron took the book and turned over its pages. A sheet of paper yellow with age suddenly fell from between the leaves. The baron picked it up and opened it, but as he looked upon the writing within his face grew deathly pale and the hand which held the paper shook so that Fritz uttered a cry of fear and hurried to his side.

"Be quiet, child; it is over," said the Herr, in a faint voice. "I am not ill. Go out into the garden; I will follow later. The book may remain here until Rosa comes."

The boys went, but from the door Fritz

anxiously looked back at the baron, and was reassured only when he saw him rise and walk up and down the room.

Toward sunset the ladies returned from the city. The children were tired out with their games; and when the evening meal was over, all retired to their rooms but Frau Sabine, who still lingered in the garden-seat enjoying a half hour in the deep silence and the lonely night. The doors leading to the garden were wide open. The delicious perfume of roses and honeysuckle pressed into the room, the crickets in the grass chirped musically, and over the forest hung the crescent of the young moon like a golden boat floating upon an azure sea.

Frau Sabine looked out upon the scene; the indescribable beauty of the landscape, the peaceful serenity of the night, enraptured her heart as ever, and lifted her spirit

to the Creator of all things. And yet a sigh of pain and longing passed her lips.

"How sad and unhappy the poor baron appeared to-day, as though striving not to show that all his sorrowful recollections had again been awakened! And is it otherwise with me? Do I not daily think of our lost Rosa as I so often speak her name in addressing the child of my care and love? What is the fate of our wanderer? Where may she be? Does she still live? or has death overtaken her too? The grief for the others is more resigned: we know that they are with God; but Rosa—the good, the lovely—perhaps poor, friendless, sick, in a strange country among savages! There is nothing so dreadful as this tormenting uncertainty." She covered her face with her hands and wept.

When Sabine raised her head, she perceived a figure moving to and fro under the

trees, and soon recognized the form of the baron. She dried her eyes quickly.

"No, this must not be; he must not again yield himself up to his grief in the solitude of night," she exclaimed, resolutely; and, going down the steps, she walked toward the baron, who stood still and awaited her.

"Dear baron, what has happened?" she asked, frightened as she perceived that the strong, self-contained man had been weeping.

"I grieve for my oldest child," he answered, softly. "The long-prayed-for news has come at last; but—ach, Sabine!—my daughter has long since left this sorrowful earth. And yet there is reason to be thankful; for, in spite of all the pain, a rich blessing is still left us. God has shown her children the way to her father's house; they have been led home to us. So long

as I live I will thank the almighty Creator for this wonderful providence."

Sabine trembled with agitation.

"I do not understand," she stammered. "What children?"

"The children who sleep yonder beneath our roof, little dreaming that they have come to their own birthright; the poor children who have lived for years in bitter poverty, and who, but for the compassion of our good friends, might have perished in want, or, worse still, have lost their purity and fallen into sin,—they are the children of my lost daughter. There is sure proof; it is impossible to doubt it."

"What!" murmured the Frau, still confused by the unexpected revelation. "Fritz and Rosa her children? But who brought the news? and who so surely knows that my darling is no longer on earth?"

"Let us go in and read the letter which I

found a few hours ago in the grandmother's prayer-book."

They returned to the garden-seat. Frau Sabine lighted the lamp with unsteady hand; the baron sat down and handed her the letter. She sank back powerless in her chair when she had unfolded the paper.

"Yes, it is her writing," she murmured; "I would know it among a thousand."

There was silence until Frau Sabine sufficiently recovered herself to read the letter. It ran:

"My dearly-loved Father: We have passed through many hard experiences in this wild country, and I have often thought of your words—that my strength was not sufficient for the wearisome life of a missionary's wife. You were not mistaken: I am ill and filled with uncontrollable homesickness. My good and kind husband has

decided to send the children and myself home on the first opportunity, but, alas! when will that be possible? I grieve at the thought of leaving him, but feel it is best; and my heart will beat joyously at the prospect of seeing you all again, of breathing the air of my mountain-home, and of bringing my dear children to receive their grandfather's blessing. Fritz is the image of his grandfather, but my sweet little Rosa will resemble me. My husband's aged mother will accompany us. She is a gentle, timid woman—spiritually-minded, perhaps to excess, but she devotedly loves the children and will not leave them. The firm faith in God on which her whole life rests will commend her to you.

"The sun is sinking behind the distant towering rocks, and the day's work is ended. My husband will presently come from his arduous duties of trying to convince these

poor heathen of the love and the power of God, and we will take our customary evening sail in the little boat that glides over the water as the swallows at home glide over the fragrant meadows.

"Will this letter ever reach you? I doubt it, for not a line from home has come to me in all these days. A sailing-vessel that touches our coast will take it, and although, like many others, it may never meet your eyes, still I must express my joy that I hope to see you all again. My heart is filled with gladness which must speak. To-morrow I will begin my preparations, and soon—ach, soon!—I may once more rest within my father's home.

"Farewell—farewell until I see you."

"Your daughter,

"Rosa."

Sabine covered her eyes and wept bitterly;

but when she looked up and saw the pale, suffering face of the baron, she forced herself to conquer her emotion, and said,

"She *is* in her Father's home; she is where it is best. Herr Baron, you must not grieve so; the painful uncertainty that tortured us is over now. We know our darling is beyond all earthly suffering. And you, dear baron, must live and work for Rosa's children. Only think what a great and unexpected blessing you have in them. You are no longer without ties; your grandchildren will grow up under your happy eyes, and the old Sabine will feel as though she had become thirty years younger, for she will again have, as in former days, her hands full in caring for the dear castle-children." She forced a smile to her kindly old face.

The baron gratefully pressed her hand:

"You are right, faithful heart; I must be content. Blessing and riches have returned

to my house, and happiness shall again smile within its walls, in place of the bitter, gnawing anxiety over the fate of the absent one."

"What will the children say," cried Sabine, beginning to realize the new position of her dear *protegés*—"those good children who win love as soon as one looks into their clear, beautiful eyes? They will be happier than ever."

"Yes, and the good Aunt Sabine, who loves them already, will spoil them as she has all the castle-children of other days. I see I must keep a watchful eye over this fond aunt," laughed the baron, quite cheerfully.

"It will be the grandpapa, and not the old Sabine, who will spoil them, and her too," returned Sabine, tearfully. "What is to be done first?"

"We will soon decide on what is best,

dear friend; you, with your clear, quiet glance, are ever right. Send the children to me early to-morrow morning; say nothing to any one, dear Sabine, until I have spoken with them," said the baron, much agitated. He pressed her hand and left the room.

When the old Frau entered her bedroom, she leaned over Rosa's couch and closely looked at the lovely face of the little sleeper, to which the country air had given a healthy color. A long lock of golden hair fell over her cheek and the rosy lips were curved in a happy smile, as though some merry jest had just been uttered.

"Strange that I have not seen it long ago!" murmured Sabine to herself. "It is our Rosa as I have seen her dozens of times, feature for feature. I ask no further proof; they need explain nothing more to me. When I look at the child, I see it all."

Then she passed into another chamber and stood before the boy's bed. Here also was the family likeness strongly repeated, and, shaking her head, Sabine exclaimed,

"How is it possible that we guessed nothing? Oh how short-sighted are we mortals in everything!"

CHAPTER VII.

A BRIGHTER DAY.

FRAULEIN THEODOLINDE had arisen early and quietly slipped into the sitting-room in order not to disturb her sister, who still slept. Since Seraphine's severe illness she had completely changed from the brusque, excitable being of former days, and now no one could be more forbearing or considerate.

"You know, dear Marie," she had confessed in a confidential hour to the Kommerzienrathin, "it is impossible to instruct and govern children, as it is now our duty, without more self-control and gentleness than I have hitherto thought of attaining. As I endeavor to correct this fault in the

little ones, how often I feel ashamed when I think of my own impatience! You were right when you once said that no one should cease trying to improve or increase in good works, but you may well believe that at first it was to me no easy task."

Now, where earnest striving is accompanied by a strong will a blessed success must follow; so the sisters became much happier as well as more amiable in their new home, and their cheerful expressions gave evidence of the change. Grateful and contented, the world appeared to them in a new light, and rose-colored spectacles gave a brighter aspect even to the every-day trials that beset the path of all mortals.

"See! see!" said Theodolinde to herself as she looked in the direction of the castle. "This will be a happy day. The red signal waves from the tower-window, inviting us over for the whole day. I must go to work

and make my arrangements here." She gave a few finishing-touches to the dainty little breakfast-table, then went below and gave to the matron the necessary supplies for the day. When she returned to the breakfast-room, she found that her sister was already there.

"I have had such dismal dreams," said Seraphine at breakfast, "that when I awakened it was a joyous relief to find myself here. I dreamed we still lived in the midst of the great city, and I sat at our window and sadly looked on the narrow street, dreamily thinking of the future; I had the old desponding, thankless heart, and anxiously asked you: 'Tell me, Linda, how I may be free from this depression and foreboding that torments me so?' But you only frowned and said, 'Ask me nothing. We are doomed to misfortune; I have the dropsy and am losing my sight, and I feel quite certain, from my symptoms,

that I shall have a stroke to-day.' Then I cried out loudly for help and awakened."

A hearty laugh burst from Theodolinde's lips, and Seraphine joined her.

"Oh what a foolish creature I was then, Sera! It is not strange that the old life will not fade out altogether, but must return in dreams. How could we expect that happiness and contentment should come at last, after so many years of trouble and repining? But our burden of discontent, our everlasting complaints and my over-anxiety concerning each real and imaginary ailment embittered our days."

"It was habit, I believe," smiled Sera.

"Yes, truly; and I, as the elder sister, should have set you a better example. You always had an instinct that we were wrong, and it needed only a breath of encouragement to fan it into a flame of clear light. But I—ach, dear!—I am ashamed of myself, and

yet must laugh that one with gray hair such a stupid old child could be. I continually thank God for the storm that has at last rooted out my old habits, and for the good fortune that has come to us. Ach! how little have I deserved it!" Her eyes glistened with tears.

"Yes, dear sister; we are a thousand times happier now, but we are also humble and grateful at heart. If only through our own experience we can learn so to guide and instruct these little ones who have been entrusted to our care that they may correct the faults that have embittered our lives, then shall we truly show our repentance and prove ourselves worthy of the responsibility that rests upon us."

"Yes, you are right. Let us hope that our little orphans will grow up into intelligent, useful men and women. I am sorry that the little Rosa is not also here. If the

good Sabine should spoil her with petting and indulgences which as a poor friendless orphan she will later lose, it would be an unfortunate thing for the child. I am quite certain that the poor little thing will sadly miss the attentions and luxuries which may not always fall to her lot."

"Theodolinde," laughed her sister, "is my dream coming true? You can surely know nothing of the future; or has one of your old-time prophecies of distress and danger—"

Theodolinde laid her hand on her sister's lips as she too broke into smiles.

"Be still! be still!" she cried. "You must not scold to-day—it is Sunday—but you may through the whole week, for I know I deserve it. But our friends at the castle expect us; we must not tarry longer,"

"Then I must hasten to the little ones,

Linda. In an hour I will be ready to go over."

Frau Sabine had awakened Fritz and Rosa earlier than usual this morning, for she knew with what impatience the baron awaited his interview with them. With a beating heart she led the children to the library, where the baron sat, and then went out into the garden with the feeling that the still, calm beauty of this Sabbath morning would impart some of its peace to her own agitated soul.

The brother and the sister uttered their morning greeting and kissed the hand of their kind friend, as was their custom morning and evening, but looked up with surprised, flushed faces at the grave but inexpressibly tender tones of his voice as he returned their salutation and, drawing them to him, kissed them both upon the lips. He sat in his arm-chair. The children stood

before him, neatly but simply dressed, their clear eyes expectantly fixed upon him; for Uncle Fritz—as they had learned to call their benefactor—to-day seemed quite different from his usual self. After his glance had for several minutes thoughtfully rested upon the children, he took from the table their grandmother's prayer-book and said,

"You love this book, my children, do you not?"

"Yes—ach, yes!" they replied; and Rosa added,

"Our grandmother loved it too, and said we must keep it for ever, but, ach! I forgot all about it, I felt so sad when she died. —Do you remember, Fritz, that dreadful morning when we went to the churchyard together and—"

"Do not think of that time, Rosa," interrupted Fritz, quickly; "only be glad that you have the book in your hands again."

"Yes, my dear child," said the baron, earnestly, "you must not only rejoice, but must thank God from your heart; for that book holds a great treasure for you both."

"A treasure?" repeated Fritz; then he added, half to himself, "But grandmother never had much money."

"Ach, uncle, is it true?" asked Rosa. "Then give it to us, I beg of you, and let us send it to the good Frau Hanna, who still lives in her poor cold little room. We need no money here, for Aunt Sabine says that you will keep us and clothe us until we are old enough to earn money for ourselves." She seized his hand and shyly kissed it in token of her gratitude.

"It is not money," said the baron, in a faint voice, as he passed his hand over his eyes; "it is a much greater treasure. In this book is a letter from your dear mother; it was written to her father and your grand-

father. Did you know anything of the letter? You are old enough to remember and understand: did your grandmother never speak to you about it?"

"Yes, but she always cried so," said Fritz, softly and sadly. "Our dear mother wrote the letter just before her death, and there was no address upon it. Grandmother could not send it, and has often been sorely grieved on account of it."

"Oh," said Rosa, "grandmother often talked to me about it, too."

"What did she say to you?" asked Herr von Ebendorf.

"She told me that we once had a happy home," began Rosa, eagerly; "that we lived in a pretty little house close by a great water; that we had a lovely garden, in which grandmother carried me around; and that our dear mother was a beautiful lady like a princess, and our father was very wise and good and

taught the heathen to love and worship the dear God. She said Fritz and I were little bits of children then, but we were all so happy together! But a terrible time came," whispered Rosa, and her glowing cheek grew pale, "for our father and our mother were drowned, and grandmother wept so much that she became blind; and then she prayed to go to heaven. Ach! and it was often so cold in our room, and—"

"Enough! enough!" cried the baron; and he leaned back in his chair. "But what did your grandmother say about the letter?" he resumed, after several minutes' silence.

The little girl looked down, as though trying to remember.

"Yes," she said, soberly; "grandmother said, too, that it would be a treasure to us, for it was the only remembrancer left of our dear mother. But that cannot help poor Frau Hanna," she added, softly, to herself.

"But it can help you, Rosa; and you too, Fritz," cried the old Herr, in great agitation. "The letter was written to me—to the father of your dear mother—and it gives you a home, my children, and a grandfather, who is here before you."

Fritz and Rosa trembled and looked mutely, almost incredulously, at the baron; but as they perceived his deep emotion and his outstretched hands, moved by a sudden impulse they sprang to his breast and put their arms about his neck, sobbing and laughing in overpowering joy.

Aunt Sabine was now called in to hear the children's story from their own lips, interrupted a dozen times by an impulsive embrace or a reference to the baron just for the pleasure of being able to repeat the new and precious name "grandpapa." Aunt Sabine too found it easier and pleasanter to substitute the "dear grandpapa" for the accustomed

name "Cousin Fritz;" and the old baron walked up and down the room as proudly as though the finest title in the land had been bestowed upon him.

At last they bethought themselves of their guests and went out into the garden, where breakfast was served in pleasant weather. The Kommerzienrathin already sat in the bower, and the children came bounding merrily toward the brother and the sister, whom they had impatiently awaited.

But the coffee grew cold and the breakfast remained untouched as the baron told of the sorrow and the joy that had come to him since their last meeting, and as he introduced Fritz and Rosa as his beloved grandchildren and thanked Frau Willmers in touching words for the warm, loving sympathy which had been the means of leading the children to their present happiness.

"I cannot think what the fate of my grand-

children would have been," he concluded, in agitated tones, "if Fritz had not found your little ones true messengers of God."

Frau Marie was deeply moved, and Margareth's eyes were filled with tears; but the irrepressible Elsie cried,

"Motherdie, I was the first to see our dear Fritz.—Was I not, Hubert?—I wonder what the aunts will say? We might run over, mother, and tell them."

Aunt Sabine laughed at the little chatterbox, but the mother gravely said,

"My dear Elsie must not be so impulsive. The aunts will come over soon, and will then share our joy."

"Oh, to-day is a lovely, happy day!" said Rosa, joyously.—"Let us stay out-doors all day, dear grandpapa, for everything around seems glad with us."

"Yes, my little Rosa," said the grandpapa, who seemed to have grown younger as well

as happier; "but first let us strengthen ourselves with the hot coffee and the cakes which I see coming this way. Our dear Aunt Marie has been kept waiting long to-day, but she will pardon us, I know."

Hubert and Fritz were well pleased with this proposition, for they had planned to spend this their last Sunday together in the forest, and had already cast longing glances at the coffee and the tempting hot cakes.

After breakfast the three little girls received permission from Aunt Sabine to gather flowers and fill the vases for the dinner-table, but Elsie ran up and down the avenue which led from the castle-gardens to the Orphans' Home, impatiently watching for the coming of the aunts. She was still in a flutter of excitement and anxious to announce the wonderful news to the friends on the other side of the hedge.

At last, at last the gate creaked on its

hinges, and two sunshades gleamed through the green leaves.

Elsie sprang toward them as though gifted with wings.

"Good-morning, good-morning!" she merrily called out from a distance. "Shall I tell you some news?" and with beaming eyes she looked up at the aunts.

Seraphine, smiling, shook her finger at her:

"May you tell the news, dear Elschen? Does it concern the mamma, or only the little ones, Chatterbox?" she asked.

Elsie's face flushed and her eyes drooped, but only for a moment; then she said quickly and joyfully,

"Mother has not forbidden my telling it; and do you know, dear aunt, she has often said that if we know something good and something that will make others glad, we may always tell it? Now, this is something

very good, and you will rejoice with us when you hear it."

"Then relieve your mind at once, my child," laughed Theodolinde.

But Elsie now smiled mischievously and hung on Aunt Seraphine's arm as she said in a melancholy tone,

"Ach! now I have quite forgotten it." Immediately after, however, she placed herself in the path before the two ladies, and cried out, "Fritz and Rosa are—are—are—"

"Well, what are they?" asked Aunt Theodolinde, somewhat impatiently. "They have not disappeared again? Do not be so foolish, Elsie."

Elsie burst out laughing, but could no longer keep the secret to herself.

"Oh no," she exclaimed; "they have not disappeared. They are over yonder, and so happy—so happy! Rosa and Fritz are Uncle Fritz's grandchildren! Yes, it is quite certain;

for there was a letter in the book which came from Frau Hanna's that made it all plain. And Uncle Ebendorf cried, and Motherdie, and every one; but, ach! why should they all cry, when they are so glad? Fritz says so too, and he has gone to the forest with Hubert."

So the child ran on, and might have continued her chatter, but the two aunts heard nothing further. They hastened on toward the castle, only Seraphine said breathlessly,

"Oh, Linda! our good cousin! Is it, then, possible for happiness to come to him again?"

But Linda, who recalled her prediction of this morning, said, with a self-condemning shake of the head,

"It is the last time. I am a regular old teapot with my prophecies and omens. Will I never learn the lesson?"

When the sisters heard the whole sad yet wonderful story from Frau Marie, they too

shared in the universal joy over the good fortune of Fritz and Rosa and the happiness of the grandfather.

The noonday meal was one of unusual festivity. The health of the Kommerzienrathin was drunk, and that of her absent husband; also Aunt Sabine's and the "Stifts" ladies, as the baron jestingly called his cousins.

The children sat under the trees and finished their dessert of almonds and raisins, with tempting dishes of the finest strawberries.

"Yes, it was truly the happiest day that ever had been," said Elsie; and she wished it would never end.

Rosa again and again quietly stole to her grandfather's side and slipped her little hand in his, while he caressingly stroked her golden head.

But even the happiest day must come to an end. The sun sank lower and lower; the

noonday heat had passed away, and old and young peacefully enjoyed the refreshing evening breeze.

The children had gone to their favorite spot, the bower of firs above on the mountain that stood as sentinels on the edge of the forest, and from which one could overlook the whole wide valley. Aunt Sabine was with them and enjoyed their lively chatter. But they suddenly ceased, awed by the magnificence of the sunset, that had never before appeared so beautiful.

"'The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork,'" said Aunt Sabine, softly.

"Look, dear aunt!" whispered Rosa, eagerly. "Now I am sure that over yonder is the heaven of which grandmother talked, and that she dwells there with the blessed angels;" and she pointed to the glowing western sky.

"No, my darling; no one truly knows where is the heaven which holds our loved ones who have left the earth, but they are safely sheltered by God's everlasting love; and this consciousness comforts us and makes us happy. Above and around us is an immeasurable, boundless space in which the sun, the moon, our earth and many millions of other bodies are found. The reflection of the sunlight on the clouds causes this wonderful magnificence that moves us so, and we look up filled with love to the Creator of such beauty, and say, 'How beautiful are the heavens!' But the splendors of these pictures often decrease, and sometimes wholly disappear from our sight; yet there is a heaven which may be ever clear and bright, in which many good angels dwell, and in which we, although on earth, may be blessed and happy."

The children gathered in a little circle

around Aunt Sabine, for her earnest, winning tones harmonized well with the solemn evening stillness and the waning daylight, and impressed their young hearts.

"Yes," said Margareth; "mother often talks to us about it. She too knows of that heaven—"

"Oh, I too," interrupted Hubert. "The sun is a million and a half times greater than the earth, and the moon is fifty times smaller than the earth."

"I do not mean that, Hubert," corrected Margareth; "all children know that who attend school and study astronomy. I mean the heaven in which we may be blessed."

"And knows our little Margareth where this heaven is?" asked Aunt Sabine.

Margareth silently nodded, and Rosa cried eagerly,

"You know it, Gretchen? Then tell us. May not we too know it?"

"Surely," replied Margareth, lovingly. "I will tell you what I mean;" and she put her arm around Rosa, laid her hand on the spot where the quick beating of the little heart could be felt through her thin summer dress, and said, almost shyly, "Here, dear Rosa—here in your heart—may be heaven."

Rosa stared at her with a look of incredulity upon her face.

"Ach, Gretchen!" she said, half impatiently, "how you talk!"

"Who can dwell here in my heart? How can angels be there?" cried Fritz, who also could not understand.

"And why, then, was grandmother so anxious to go to heaven?" asked Rosa.

"Gently, gently, my children," warned Aunt Sabine. "Listen to me. The grandmother longed for heaven; that is true, for all people desire to go to heaven. But, ach! how few understand that there is a way to it

on earth—that here we may be as blessed as in the eternal home of God!"

"Oh, aunt, I really understand it quite well," cried Elsie, impulsively; "for sometimes I am as merry and happy as only the angels can be."

Aunt Sabine raised her hand with a motion of dissent:

"No, dear Elsie; the happiness of which you now speak has not its source in this heaven. There are earthly joys for which we thank God; they beautify this life, but they are not lasting and may at any time leave us. Where then would be our heaven? Inexhaustible treasures that cannot pass away must they be that open the way to heaven—that ensure us its blessedness both here and in eternity, But we must daily seek the way and the means with earnest and strong desire; and when we are in the right path, then will fall at times a

gleam of heavenly happiness into our hearts, even here on this earth, and thus we may readily guess what the word 'blessed' really signifies."

"But, auntie," cried Elsie, "indeed I am very often blessed; for truly I am always happy."

"Dear child," smiled the old Frau; and she kissed the little girl, who, with Rosa, had nestled close to her side. "You are right, for has He not said, 'Let the little ones come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven'? And says He not also, 'Blessed are the pure in heart'? Now, my dear children, a little child, a good child, is pure in heart; therefore the peace of heaven is in his heart and he is blessed. But as you grow older many dangers threaten this heaven from without. Then will falsehood, vanity, pride, self-will, envy, discontent, scorn, and many other

evil companions, unperceived slip into the little heart."

"We will see," interrupted Hubert; and he quickly laid his clenched hand on his breast, as though even now defying the enemies approaching this fortress. "I will not let them in."

"Nor I," "Nor I, either," echoed Elsie and Rosa; but Margareth said in her thoughtful way,

"Yes, we all think that, but it is not quite so easy."

"An angel called Conscience guards the entrance," said Aunt Sabine, encouragingly. "He loudly and anxiously warns you when a wicked guest would press into your heart. You must all carefully listen to the voice of this angel during your whole lives, for then will you admit only good spirits unto your hearts—unchanging faith, warm, active human love, patient, quiet hope—and you will keep

your pure blessed child—hearts as long as you live, and will know where heaven lies even here upon earth."

"But, aunt," said Fritz, "our grandmother said there was great splendor and magnificence in heaven."

"Yes, Fritz, and your grandmother was right; for there is nothing more beautiful than a true, loving human heart which not only bears heaven within itself, but also spreads its joy around it. And if, while here on earth, as messengers of the Master, as ministering angels, you dry the tears of sorrow and draw forth smiles of joy, then are you blessed here and may look forward with peace and confidence to the blessedness which shall belong to them who have rightly lived this life."

"Ach, aunt! it seems as if our mother were talking," said Margareth, softly; "you think just as she does."

Frau Sabine's expression was a very happy one at this moment:

"Yes, dear Margareth; we have many thoughts in common, and so your mother and I love each other very dearly. She has always lived in the great city, I far away from all bustle and noise; but we have both earnestly sought the answer to the question 'Where is heaven?' And we have both—thanks to the good God!—learned the way. But come now, my little flock; it is already growing dark."

Hand in hand in peaceful, gentle mood the children walked homeward; even the little Chatterbox had become quiet, and more heartfelt than usual were the embraces with which the little party bade one another "Good-night."

The next day the Kommerzienrath arrived to carry home his loved ones, whom he had

sorely missed, but first he must pay a visit of inspection to the surrounding country. In his mind he had long planned a change, and now he found himself in a position to carry out his project. This was to retire from business and devote the remainder of his life entirely to his family—to leave the busy, noisy city and amid the beautiful and healthful surroundings of nature to bring up his little flock. His acquaintance with the baron, which had ripened into a hearty friendship during the few days they had spent together in Breslau, had helped mature his plan. The baron had represented the country in which his estate lay as beautifully situated. The inducement of such an agreeable neighbor, and, above all, the letters of his wife and children, filled with rapture over Tannenwiese and regrets that they must leave their dear friends and the delightful mountains, settled the matter with Papa Willmers, and he

decided to establish his future home in that district if possible. Now, after a few days amid the pleasant circle, he was so agreeably impressed by his surroundings that his intention was quickly carried into effect. He purchased a handsome, spacious mansion in Riesenburg, only half a mile from Tannenwiese. Lovely gardens and beautiful woodlands surrounded the new home, and the children made a thousand plans for the wonderful times they should have together, for the Willmers family were to move into the country the following spring.

Rosa and Elsie, who possessed lively imaginations, built innumerable air-castles, in anticipation celebrating picnics in the depths of the shadowy forests, dolls' parties under the great trees on the lawns, sumptuous dinners with the rare privilege of almonds and raisins for dessert, and the important anniversary of the opening of the Orphans'

Home, with a group of happy, rosy children dancing on the green, and fairy-stories from the indulgent aunts, until the title of "chatterbox" was no longer confined to Elsie alone, for her honors were equally shared with Rosa, whom Aunt Seraphine had christened "the rival chatterbox." Fritz and Hubert dreamt of future exploring expeditions over mountain and valley, of strawberry- and blueberry-gatherings, and Margareth already in thought assisted the dear mother in packing for the removal from Breslau and in arranging and beautifying the home in Riesenburg.

Papa Willmers was overpowered with endearing terms and caresses; even Aunt Theodolinde almost threw her arms about his neck in her delight when she learned the good news; and Aunt Sera no longer remembered that she has "wrestled and struggled," so joyous had life grown to her,

so charming was the prospect of always having near the dear true friends to whom she owed the enjoyment of these calm, untroubled days.

"Oh what a different life it will be here among the woods and mountains from that between the rows of houses in the city!" said Hubert.

"But all the days are not holidays even here, my son," reminded Herr Willmers, "and the picnics and the exploring expeditions are only for hours after the tasks are done."

"Oh yes, we know, papa," said Elsie, wisely. "Fritz and Hubert will study at the academy in Riesenburg, and Margareth, Rosa and I will attend the seminary; and one holiday the Tannenwiesers will come to us, and the next we will go to them; and we will have such good times at school! and at home we will—"

"'Good times'!" laughed Hubert; "that is true, Elsie. Why should we not?"

In view of these brilliant prospects, the farewell to Tannenwiese was not so sad as all had feared; besides, the baron had promised to bring Frau Sabine and the children to visit the Willmers family at Christmas. He should have business in Breslau during the winter; it agreed well with his plans to spend some time with the dear friends and look after the grave of the good grandmother. So they parted with a few tears, but with smiles breaking through as they uttered the joyous, hopeful "Auf frohes Wiedersehen!"

CHAPTER VIII.

CHRISTMAS JOYS.

SOFTLY, yet in bewildering numbers, fell the snowflakes, one after the other, pressing down as rapidly as though they could not reach the earth soon enough to protect it from the fierce north wind that swept over the heath. Sea and river lay silent beneath the icy hands which checked their onward flow, and from the eaves of the houses in the great city glistening pendants overhung window-panes engraved with rare crystal bloom. The people hurried through the streets or hugged the cheery fires in the cosiest rooms of their warm dwellings.

It was a bleak and bitterly cold winter day, and yet all were gay and festive; for it was

Christmas-tide, and Christmas without snow and ice outdoors, and frosty window-panes, seemed no real, true merry Christmas-time, maintained young and old. Never is the severity of Winter's reign so loved; never is he greeted with greater gladness than when he spreads this marvellous shining mantle abroad, over hill and valley, and illumines it with magical beauty as the great golden Christmas sun bursts forth in all his glory, suggestive of the flaming lights that decorate the green fir tree with its mysterious holiday bloom.

"Did I not say so?" cried Elsie Willmers as she ran to the window in her night-dress and watched the whirling snowflakes. "Did I not say so, Gretel? We will have a white Christmas. Ach! and how white! It snows as though it would never stop."

"Hush, Elsie!" reminded Margareth; "Rosa is still asleep, and we must not awaken

her, for she is very tired after her long journey."

Elsie dressed herself as quickly as possible, with a running accompaniment of whispered thoughts to her sister. It was impossible to keep to herself all the joy that filled her little heart to-day. It was as though one happiness followed in the footsteps of another. So much had happened since this time yesterday morning! In the forenoon the school had closed after entertaining exercises, and Elsie had returned home with a good report of promotion into a higher class, receiving with open satisfaction the praises and congratulations of parents, brother and sister. After dinner came the excitement of preparing for the reception of the Tannenwiesers, as she called them, with permission to descend with Jacob into the cellar and to mount with Susanne to the store-room, and to test the various kinds of

cakes which, partly in honor of the dear expected guests, partly to celebrate the Christmas festival, had been baked. At evening the friends had been welcomed by a stormy greeting, followed by a blissful hour in the children's room. There had been so much to fill this one day to overflowing that our little Elsie went to bed almost as tired as Rosa, and slept soundly until morning. How joyous was the awaking this morning with the thought, "Fritz and Rosa are here, and to-morrow is the holy Christmas Eve!" and yet a new delightful surprise with the glance out on the snowy streets. Yesterday everything looked gray and damp, but to-day just the right longed-for Christmas weather, more beautiful even than ever before.

It was not long before the travellers also were awake, and the day's pleasures began.

While the baron and Herr Willmers went out immediately after breakfast to make

purchases for the morrow's festival, the children, in the warm and cozy *saal*, decorated a giant fir tree, which should be lighted by a hundred candles this evening and rejoice the hearts of many little ones whose homes could afford no Christmas tree. Nothing could the children more enjoy than this work of arranging the rosy apples, the gold and silver nuts, the sweet heart-shaped cookies, the gorgeous bonbons, and a host of other attractive knickknacks, between the dark green needles, then to adorn each branch and every little twig with the bright-colored candles which should lend a bewitching glow to all this magnificence.

Margareth placed on the long white-covered table the gifts which her mother had prepared for her poor children; she knew just as well as her mother for whom this or that pretty present was intended, for Frau Willmers had from their earliest youth

enlisted, as far as possible, her children's sympathies in all her charitable undertakings, had taught them that it was one of their most sacred duties and privileges to comfort and assist their fellow human beings in every way with love and self-denial; and already they had often known the happiness of bringing smiles to sorrowful, troubled faces. So this forerunner of their own festival was a great pleasure, and one eagerly anticipated by the children. They had contributed to it many spare groschen besides the pretty dolls, picture-books and toys which lay beside the more substantial gifts of their mother upon the Christmas-table. Very pretty was the room when all was finished. Each child's place was surrounded by a bower of fir branches, and above, on one of the thickly-sugared raisin-cakes which lay in every plate, Hubert had dropped a Christmas card with

the name of the happy little boy or girl for whom it was intended.

By noon all the adornments were completed, and after dinner the little party, followed by Susanne, who bore an enormous basket, wended their way toward the Christmas market. Here all the most tempting toys and sweetmeats were enticingly displayed. Our young friends admired and passed on, but purchased none of these: the good servant Rupprecht would care for their pleasure; and yet the lid of Susanne's basket was lifted again and again, until it would scarcely cover what the children bought. They had for several years known a portion of the Christmas market where the stalls where small and shabby and generally attended by poor old women or half-grown girls and boys, who longingly looked at the passers-by. Their wares were simple and frequently the work of their own

hands, yet they cheerfully accosted the visitors to the market and begged them only to look at their little stock; they were so anxious to earn something for their Christmas festival that they might spend the day in only a little less bitter distress than the rest of the days. Our party wandered up and down these aisles, always leaving behind them happier hearts and brighter faces.

At a little stand covered by a dingy gray linen awning supported by four poles sits an old woman who has bunches of horseradish for sale, and little flower-pots filled with paper roses. Ach! on her withered face the roses no longer bloom; it wears the pale-yellowish hue of hunger and distress. How poorly the Frau is protected from the cold! How seldom the passers-by glance at her or her wares! Does no one care for horseradish or paper roses?

Yes, some one. Margaréth has already drawn out her dainty little purse: several of the flower-pots will look quite pretty on the table in the *saal*, and horseradish is not quite useless in the kitchen. To the delight of the poor woman, a dozen stalks of horse-radish and six of the little flower-pots are transferred to the covered basket, and in her hand she finds a shining silver thaler.

"Ach, my pretty Fraülein! I have not change enough here, but wait a moment, and I will—"

Margareth grows quite red, but bends over and joyfully whispers in her ear,

"That is quite right. Roses will not bloom at Christmas, so I will pay you a little more for these."

She moves away so quickly that she does not see the tears of gladness in the eyes of the old Frau.

Elsie and the others are now beside a blind

man who is led by a boy carrying a number of straw baskets which he is so eagerly trying to sell for his father. The man is old and blind, with many cares, and but few pleasures to brighten his long night. At Christmas people buy so many costly luxuries that his humble wares are unheeded, and the child's voice is scarcely heard:

"Will no one buy these pretty little baskets? They are not dear."

Yes, for why had Hubert gone out if not to bring home just such a treasure as this? It is true he has purchased wax birds and wooden figures from other poor tradesmen, and, as he tells his sisters with a radiant countenance, "paid them right well for them;" but the poor man needs money. A couple of baskets for Elsie and Rosa are not to be despised, and joyfully the little merchant separates two of them from the bunch, and is quite happy as Hubert presses four

times their price into his hand and merrily runs away.

Elsie has grown quite sharp-sighted in finding out the stalls of the poorest people, and it is all the same to her whether she buys a wooden churn or tiny cooking-utensils, frail toy-furniture that almost falls in pieces at a touch, shabby little trinkets, or whatever else may be crowded into Susanne's basket, if she may only pay out her little coins and see happy faces in return.

"Oh, look, Rosa! there are the chimney-sweepers again," she exclaims, and points to the old basket of the still older fruit-vender, in which a whole army of the little men lie in every conceivable position.

Little reader, are you acquainted with the plum-men? If you are familiar with the Breslau market, there is no doubt you are. They look quite pretty, these little coal-black chimney-sweepers made of baked

plums, with their gay-colored scarfs, shining eyes and stiff, dignified bearing.

The old fruit-woman is much less stiff than they. Her back is bent with age, but her expression is much more lively than that of the chimney-sweepers. Much, too, of sorrow and trouble, of labor and fatigue, may be read therein. She wears a dress that has been washed and mended so often that it has entirely lost its original color, a short cloak as shabby and faded as the dress, and an old straw hat is tied down over her rusty little cap. Yes, she is very poor and very old, but now, at Christmas-time, she cannot think of that; she has a very important, business-like air. She so arranges her plum-men that they may appear at their best, and rubs the apples with her shaking hands till they shine and look quite tempting; she breathes on her cold fingers, and longingly the good old eyes look at the bustling crowd

of buyers; but no one pauses at her stall. Is there no one, then, who will look at her little plum-men?

"Oh, dear Susanne, there is still room in the basket," pleads Elsie. "We must have our chimney-sweepers under our Christmas tree;" and she and her sister pack the miniature men, one after the other, in the basket until Susanne laughingly declares,

"Now you have enough; I am not quite equal to an express-wagon, although I carry enough furniture for four rooms, and cooking-utensils for as many kitchens, besides all the other things, and now must add an army of men! Truly, my arms will bear no more."

The good old fruit-woman clasps her hands and admiringly looks after the departing group. She has not earned as much in the whole day in which she has sat here in the cold.

"God bless the good children!" murmur her pale lips.

The Christmas festival of the poor children, in the evening, was full of pleasure, but their joy was boundless the following evening when the folding-doors were thrown open and their own Christmas tree stood revealed in all its beauty.

Never in their young lives had Fritz and Rosa beheld anything like this—never had they known how happy children celebrate Christmas Eve. Only from the rambling talks of the feeble old grandmother had they known of their earliest years, when they too had loving parents, but she, in her deep trouble, had never thought of adorning a tree for the little ones; and even if it had occurred to her, the means would have been wanting. So on both evenings Fritz and Rosa stood speechless with surprise and

admiration before the brilliant, fairy-like splendor of these blooming fir trees; and when their grandfather led them to the tables prepared for them and richly laden with gifts from him and their kind friends, they only gazed in a state of utter bewilderment at the collection of beautiful things which they were told were all their own. Then followed impetuous embraces, tears and laughter, and joyous sobs that moved their grandpapa, Frau Marie, Sabine, and even Papa Willmers, to feel their own eyes glistening with sympathy. Even the quiet Margareth agreed with Elsie when she declared that "Christmas was always beautiful, but never had there been such a happy, delightful one as this."

"And to-morrow, dear grandpapa, let us go to Frau Hanna," begged Rosa, in the midst of her pleasure, "and I will take my largest sugar-cakes to her.—I wonder if she

will know us, Fritz? I will put on my new hat and spread a veil over my face, and say, 'Who am I?'"

"No, she will not know you," assured Elsie; "it is quite impossible. You are no longer pale, Rosa; and then just think of the long, long time since she has seen you!"

"Long indeed!" laughed Aunt Sabine. "My lambs, it is not yet a year since you came to us."

"No," said Fritz, thoughtfully. "But what a good, beautiful year it has been to us!" He nestled close to his grandfather's side and seized his hand as though to assure himself that his good fortune were really a fact.

"Yes, we will go to Frau Hanna to-morrow," promised the baron. "She has been a kind friend to your grandmother, and has loved you, my little ones; and we will

show her that our hearts have not forgotten her."

"And when will we go to grandmother?" asked Rosa, softly.

"To-morrow also, my Rosa," was the answer.

It was on Christmas morning that Frau Hanna, free for the first time from the painful suffering which for months past had kept her a prisoner in her bed, sat in the old arm-chair which had once belonged to her lost neighbor and warmed herself by the stove, in which, after much trouble, she had been able to kindle a fire. It was still quite cold in the little attic-room; the window-panes were covered with a thick sheet of ice, and the poor washerwoman looked pale and sad from sickness and care. Her hymn-book lay on the table before her, with some bread and an empty cup; the brown coffee-pot,

with whose contents it should be filled, had just been set upon the stove. Frau Hanna looked with a longing glance at the true old friend of her lonely hours, for coffee was her breakfast, her dinner and her supper when the more nourishing food with which her good friend the Kommerzienrathin Willmers often supplied her had come to an end. She had been unable to earn anything for herself since the summer, and thanked God daily for sending Frau Marie to her little room as his messenger to help her in her bittter necessity. At this moment she was thinking of the good Frau, and her hands folded themselves in a silent prayer for her benefactress. The Kommerzienrathin had been kind to her in many ways since the death of her old friend and neighbor. She had bestowed upon her all the earthly goods left by the grandmother, and had given her work and paid a higher price than that usually

received by the poor woman; so that she had hoped to lay aside a few spare groschen against the coming winter. But then this dreadful sickness came, and she could no longer earn enough to keep want from the door. At first she was only confined to her room, but was finally compelled to stay in her bed by the intense pain. What would have become of her then if the Kommerzienrathin had not so fortunately come to her assistance?

Frau Hanna arose and tried to walk up and down the room, but her feet were stiff and feeble and the once strong arms tired and weak, and with a deep sigh she resumed her former place. Again she folded her hands and murmured to herself:

"Ach, dear God! give me strength only to earn my little piece of bread, or take me to thyself as quickly as possible. The doctor has said I must not wash nor scour; must I

sit here year after year and depend upon the charity of others? Must I for ever be a burden to the good lady? Ach! it is a bitter thought. And where can I stay? Will it not soon be with me as bad as the misfortune which threatened the grandmother? I too must move on the first of the year; the landlord wishes to build a new house, and therefore must tear down the old. Where will I find a room at such a low rent, and who will seek one for me? I cannot be so bold as to ask this of the good lady. No, no! It were better for me to lie down and close my eyes for ever, as the grandmother did a year ago. Ach! ach! how full of trouble is life!"

In spite of these sad reflections, the old Frau again attentively looked toward the stove, and, as a fragrant steam now ascended from the coffee-pot, she lifted her old friend and began her breakfast with such good

appetite that the hour for which she longed seemed as yet quite distant. Suddenly she sat down her cup and listened. Yes, really; footsteps were approaching; they came not only up the last flight of stairs, but directly toward her door. Who could it be? Perhaps Susanne, from the Kommerzienrath's, or Jacob.

A knock.

"Come in!" cried Frau Hanna; and a tall, stately, gentleman, an old lady and two children appeared upon the threshold.

Quite startled by the unexpected sight, the washerwoman raised herself from her chair and seized her crutch, although doubtful as to the correctness of her vision, and was about to courtesy to the strangers when the children—a boy and a girl—ran up to her, grasped her hands and exclaimed as with one voice, "Who am I?"

"Ach, you dear children!" exclaimed Frau

Hanna; and in an instant she forgot the stately gentleman and the lady, forgot her stiff limbs and her countless troubles, and embraced and kissed Fritz and Rosa with a tenderness that one would scarcely have expected of the poor old Frau. "Rosa—dear little Rosa! And Fritz, the good boy! So tall! so fine!"

"Do you see, grandpapa? She knew us at once," said Rosa, joyfully.

These words recalled to Frau Hanna the presence of her other visitors.

"Pardon, Your Lordship, that I am so forgetful," she said, in confusion; "but, ach! I was so glad to see the dear little faces once more, and looking so—so changed and so happy.—Oh, my darlings, how you do look—healthy and bright and merry!" and again she had eyes only for the two children.

The baron and Frau Sabine were deeply moved by the appearance of the miserable

little garret-room and the poverty of the only friend of the children's grandmother. When Frau Hanna again looked up at them and saw tears in their eyes, she exclaimed, in astonishment,

"What fortune has the dear Lord, then, sent to the children? It seems as though the gracious Herr and Frau care for them even as much as their own grandmother did."

"Yes, Frau Hanna," said the baron; and he moved nearer. "We love the children quite as much."

"This is our grandpapa, Frau Hanna," explained Fritz.

"And our Aunt Sabine, who has known and loved our blessed mother, and who now loves us," added Rosa.

Frau Hanna stood still and shook her head incredulously:

"Yes, but how could that be possible?"

"Do you not know, dear Frau, that 'all things are possible with God'? Have you not read in your hymn-book there the verse,

> 'Tis with the almighty God an easy thing
> To make the troubled heart with joybells ring'?"

said Frau Sabine, gently. "When Fritz and Rosa are older and visit you again, they will explain to you what they hardly as yet understand themselves."

"Oh yes; we understand," said Fritz, importantly. "We have the best grandpapa in the world, and the dearest Aunt Sabine, and are as happy as it is possible for any one to be."

"Yes, you are happy, my son," said the baron; "and we have all come to-day to thank the good Frau Hanna for her kindness to my grandchildren and their grandmother."

"Oh, gracious Herr," exclaimed Frau

Hanna, "the little good that I could do has already been repaid a thousand times by the Frau Kommerzienrathin. I have never had so much kindness before in my life, and to-day—ach! to-day has come this great pleasure to me.—Look at me, Rosa, you timid little creature!—How merry her eyes are! Ach! if only the grandmother could see her now! Am I dreaming, or is it really true?" She pressed her hand to her forehead with a troubled expression.

Rosa laughed up in her face:

"You are wide awake, Frau Hanna. To-day is Christmas, and we have brought you something pretty."

Frau Hanna turned away:

"Ach! I want nothing more. I cannot—"

"Yes, yes! You must accept it," cried Fritz, eagerly. "We always received what you brought us; do you not remember that?"

"And how often have you mended our clothes and brought grandmother a pot of coffee! Do you not remember that?" asked Rosa. "And you stayed with us all night long that sad time; you have not forgotten that?"

The tears streamed over the pale cheeks of the washerwoman, but she smiled and nodded as one after another the children recalled the kind deeds which she had done for them in past years.

Rosa now brought from her little basket the largest sugar-cakes and sweetmeats from her Christmas-table, and from Aunt Sabine's larger bag came a beautiful Christmas cake, with a goodly supply of sugar and coffee; and presently Fritz appeared with a box which they had left standing outside the door, raised the lid and bade Frau Hanna look within, but the poor Frau's eyes were blinded with tears and she could see nothing more.

She heard the children triumphantly tell that the box and its contents were hers, that Aunt Sabine herself had made the clothes and Aunt Theodolinde and Aunt Seraphine had knit the stockings; and Rosa whispered in her ear that in the pocket of the woollen dress there was something she must not see until they had gone: grandpapa had put it there. Then she heard as in a dream that Uncle Willmers had found a little room for her, and that she must be ready on the afternoon of New Year's Day, for Jacob would come for her things, and Susanne would be there, in readiness to accompany her to her new home.

And then they all disappeared so quickly that Frau Hanna had not time to say one word of thanks. The coffee had become quite cold, and once more she sat in her arm-chair with folded hands, but with a happy light in her eyes, the grateful, glad

smile of the Christmas-time, for its joys had reached her too in her lonely little room.

"Was she glad to see you?" exclaimed Elsie as she ran down the steps to meet Fritz and Rosa on their return; she had stood at the window for an hour burning with impatience and listening for the sound of the carriage-wheels. "Did she know you? It was too bad mother would not allow us to go with you! Was she surprised? Was it not beautiful?"

"Yes, more than I can tell you," replied Rosa, with a happy smile.

"And she knew us at once," said Fritz. "But what will she say on New Year's Day?"

Elsie clapped her hands.

"Oh, that will be a delightful time!" she shouted. "And we will all be there together. I rejoice over that day and night."

"And I!" "And I!" cried Fritz and Rosa.

"I wish it were here now," said Rosa; "it is a long time to wait."

The grandfather and Aunt Sabine laughed at their impatience, and Sabine said softly,

"How our little ones rejoice at the prospect of giving happiness to another! and yet so many parents think the only way to make their children's hearts glad is by ministering to their own amusement and pleasure by vain show and useless toys that are cast aside in a short time and followed by a desire for something more entertaining. If they would only sow in the impressionable young hearts the seeds of a lasting happiness that should take root and bring forth fruits to enrich and beautify their whole lives!"

Five happy, merry days, five long sweet, peaceful nights, passed away, and at last the Sylvester sun arose—somewhat late, it is true,

but so bright and clear that one might be pardoned for wondering if it were not May instead of January.

With joyous hearts and expectant faces our little party started forth after dinner, and as they wandered along the promenade, each tree of which was now, as a year ago, adorned by a beautiful glistening starry robe, it seemed as though they were traversing some magically-transformed bower. It is true the little noses were somewhat reddened by the cold air, but the hearts beat with such joyous excitement that the children were really unconscious of the rude north wind. They were not accompanied by the older members of the family to-day. The distance was short; the end of their walk lay before them now—a large old-fashioned brick house with tall chimneys, projecting corner towers and many clear shining windows, through which one could see pretty white curtains,

plants in bloom, and here and there a cheerful, kindly old face. On one side stood a venerable church; it was separated from the street by a pleasant garden. Quite peacefully must life pass here near the Sabbath bells and with the view of the promenade, which is beautiful in winter as well as in summer, but truly most fair when all nature around is green and blooming.

"Do not walk so fast," begged Margareth; "we might slip or fall down, and thus break the bottles."

"That would be a fine thing!" laughed Elsie; and she obediently moderated her steps, but not for long.

When they reached the Home for Aged and Infirm Women—for such was the name of this lovely retreat—they eagerly mounted the steps, and only when Jacob, who had already been here an hour, opened for them the door of a pretty, cosy little room did

their excitement begin to sober down into a more quiet joy.

"Ach! Yes, yes! It is the arm-chair in which grandmother always sat; and there is my little stool too," said Rosa, with a wistful expression; and Fritz stood before the old chest of drawers with the high feet and the brass handles, which Jacob had polished until they shone like gold, and sighed softly at the recollection of how often he had vainly sought for a piece of bread in the upper drawer, which had served also as a store-room.

But Margareth, perceiving the sadness that had fallen upon the children, cried,

"Hasten, dear Rosa, and fill the sugar-bowl.—And you, Elsie, pour the cream into the pitcher, but carefully, that you may not spill it." She meanwhile proceeded to put the coffee in the old brown coffee-pot, which stood close to its familiar friend the cup, as

though both felt rather timid in this fine new dwelling. Then she spread a white cloth over the table and arranged everything for Frau Hanna's supper in her own pretty little manner.

"Jacob, you have made her things look beautiful," said Elsie.—"And see, Hubert! Mother has thought of everything. There are all the things for Frau Hanna to cook with, on that side-table; and what a pretty rug is before the bed, with soft warm felt shoes on it!"

But Hubert had no time to listen or to look, for he and Fritz were occupied in moving a table a little to the right, although it looked quite well where it stood; but they must do something in the universal preparation.

Listen! She is coming. A carriage stops before the door.

"Here she comes!" whispered all the rosy lips; and all the bright, expectant child-

ish eyes were fixed upon the door, while the little ones sought to conceal themselves as far as was possible.

The door opened, and the feeble old washerwoman stepped into the room leaning on Susanne's arm. Had she grown so much weaker? It seemed as though she could not hold herself upright and had not strength to speak; but as she now, with a bewildered look, saw all her own furniture around her, she hastily withdrew her arm from Susanne's, sank upon her knees and raised her hands toward heaven:

"O thou good and loving God, is it true? May I live here—here, where I have so often looked in silent longing? here, where rest and peace remain after all the pain and care? How could I think such wonderful blessing possible for me? Are there, then, truly angels on earth, as the grandmother said?" She sobbed like a child.

The children, in their hiding-places, sobbed too, and Jacob made dreadful contortions to conceal his emotions; but Susanne, who had from her mistress learnt something of her own quiet self-control, bravely kept the tears back, put her arms about the trembling Frau, raised her and carefully led her to the arm-chair. Now the children came forward, and there was no end to the questions and answers and rejoicings.

Margareth quietly lighted the little petroleum-stove, placed the coffee-pot upon it and like an attentive hostess made preparation for refreshment for Frau Hanna. Yet it was doubtful whether the coffee would taste of salt or of sugar, for bright tears, which she could not restrain, would fall even into the brown coffee-pot.

Jacob and Susanne had long ago gone home, for they were needed, and it was growing

dark, when our little party moved with rapid steps toward the city. Innumerable gaslights gleamed along the snow-covered promenade; a golden gleam was in the western sky, and from the spire of the cathedral deep melodious sounds announced the hour. The two boys walked arm in arm, and Margareth between the younger girls, but all were silent. The young hearts were full of sympathy and touched with a feeling beyond the power of expression. The world around them, shining mistily in the evening light, and the echoes of the happy Christmas, still ringing in their souls, mingled with the afternoon's experience and in the nature of each touched a new chord that on some future day should awaken into sweet music.

In the bright light of the festively-adorned sitting-room at home the spell was broken, and all were now ready to relate everything, even the least incident, to the parents.

"Aunt Sabine, you cannot imagine how much we enjoyed it," Rosa concluded her share of the narrative. "I am so happy!"

"Does my dear child know *why* she is so happy?" asked Aunt Sabine, with a smile.

"Because I have had such a delightful day, auntie dear."

"No, Rosa; it is because you helped to bestow happiness upon another. That is why you are so glad at heart."

"Yes, I understand," cried Elsie; "and when we grow older and have more money, we can cause greater happiness and will be still more joyful ourselves.—Is it not true, Motherdie?"

The Kommerzienrathin put her arms about the impulsive child and kissed the smiling lips:

"Yes, do that, my Elsie; and all of you, dear children. Strive to bestow happiness wherever it is in your power; you will then

be richly blessed and sure of happiness on this beautiful earth of God's. You will be able to look back with thankful hearts on each year you have lived, and to begin each new one with faith and joyous confidence, and—"

"And make a heaven of your own on earth even as this true and loving friend and mother," added the baron; and all drew nearer Frau Marie, until they formed a circle around her, murmuring, "Yes! yes!"

"She is only striving to walk in the path that leads to heaven," said the gentle Frau, with a smile; but her eyes shone through glistening tears. "Now lay your little hands in mine and let us make an agreement that we will all seek this way and follow it with our whole hearts; that we will leave the evil and cling to the good, spreading abroad the sunshine of happiness, the golden light of heaven, so that other lives also shall

know the heaven of the heart while here on earth."

A close pressure of warm hands and a kiss for each eager upturned face sealed the compact.

Whether our young friends remained true to their pledge or were enticed from their chosen path by false lights and the sweet fragrance of poison-flowers,—that will I relate to my dear readers on some future day.

THE END.

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